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THE TRIFLER

BY ARCHIBALD EYRE

I.

MY BROTHER'S MARRIAGE

AFTER a courtship that lasted only a few months, my brother Gerald married and departed on his honeymoon. As a younger brother, not too well endowed with this world's goods, and dependent for comfortable living on his good-will, I sighed a little as I performed the functions of best man. He had allowed forty years to pass without evincing any desire for matrimony; he had assured me frequently that he was "wedded" to political life; and only a few months previously he had been elevated to Cabinet rank. Certainly, none of these things entitled me to assume that he would never marry, but as he was fifteen years my senior, and seemed quite remarkably old for his age, I had gradually convinced myself that he would always remain a bachelor.

However, the unexpected happened, and if anyone was to blame, I suppose I was, for I had introduced him to Mabel Fielders at Henley. If my brother *had* to get married, he could not have made a better choice, for Mabel was very pretty, not too young, and of excellent family.

I called just after their engagement was announced, and happened on one of the rare occasions when she was alone.

"So you are actually going to marry my big brother?" I said, with a melancholy shake of my head. "I do hope you won't regret it."

"I am sure we shall be very happy, and—and—I hope you will always look on me as a sister—a very dear sister."

"Oh, certainly," I replied readily enough. Mabel was always pretty, but I have noticed that when a girl gets engaged to a man for whom

she cares her looks immediately improve. "What a lot of new brothers I shall have!" I added.

"What do you mean?" asked Mabel. "I am an only child, as you know."

"I thought that perhaps you had promised to be a sister to all those scores of unhappy men you must have rejected in my brother's favor."

"No nice girl has to refuse scores of men," she returned indignantly. "And even if she had, she would not offer to be their sister. I am afraid you take your views of women from comic papers."

"How did you manage, then?" I went on idly. "You must have had lots of experience."

"I have not," she asserted warmly. "You seem to think I have been a heartless flirt."

"Oh, no," I replied politely. "By the way, I haven't seen George Trefusis lately."

She was putting a lump of sugar into a teacup, and the lump missed the cup and fell into the saucer. She looked up with a scared expression. "Whatever put Mr. Trefusis into your head? I cannot follow the association of ideas."

But I noticed she could, for her face had lost something of its brightness. "It just occurred to me that I had not seen him lately."

"He went to Australia," she replied constrainedly.

"For good?"

"Oh, no, only to look after some property there. I believe he will be back shortly."

"He will be glad to hear of your engagement. You were great friends."

"Were we?"

"Were you not?"

"I don't know." She handed me my cup and sat down in an arm-chair, staring abstractedly out of the window.

The conversation seemed in danger of collapsing. "I knew Trefusis at Oxford," I threw in to keep it going.

She turned quickly towards me. "Did you know him well?"

"Yes, fairly well."

She dropped her voice. "And did you like him?"

"No, I can't say I did."

She sat up in her chair. "But at first—when you first knew him?" she asked eagerly.

"I think he rather attracted me at the outset," I owned rather reluctantly.

She gave a little sigh. "That is the experience of everyone who meets him."

"Trefusis is a mystery," I observed, "and I am not sure I want to know the solution."

"He has such nice eyes," she continued dreamily,—"such beautiful, brown, faithful, dog-like eyes. He is so frank and boyish in manner."

"In manner—yes."

"So handsome and polite and considerate."

"He does appear so."

She frowned thoughtfully. "That's just it! And in reality——"

"In reality——"

"Oh, I don't know what he is in reality. Does anyone? Do you?"

"I am sure I don't."

"Then why did you say you didn't like him?"

"Did I say so?"

"Of course you did."

"I don't know why I don't like him."

"Have you ever known him to do a mean thing?"

I hesitated. "Well, I am not certain, but somehow or other, if——"

"If what?"

I drew my chair closer to hers. "I don't know if you have noticed," I said confidentially, "that some misfortune invariably happens to anyone who offends him. We noticed it at Oxford. It became a by-word."

Mabel looked at me with startled eyes. "I have noticed it too," she whispered. "It is very curious. Quite little things too. Do you remember old Lady Tremayne insisting that he had negro blood in his veins, and then just a few days later she——"

"I remember. Oh, I could tell you heaps of things like that. And yet I have never been able to feel certain he was really to blame. It is simply curious."

She gave a little shiver. "Do you know, he frightens me. And yet I don't know why."

I nodded. "I know the feeling. The more you know him, the less you know him. At first you imagine he has a transparent nature. And then you are not so sure. Then you are sure he has not. Finally, you can't believe anything too bad to be true of him. Funny, isn't it?"

Mabel drew a long breath. "For some months," she said, "I thought he was charming. I even thought I——" She stopped suddenly, and her cheeks reddened.

"He is not a man of whom I would care to make an enemy," said I. "Not that I am afraid of him."

"Isn't it turning cold?" asked Mabel. She shivered again perceptibly. I rose and shut the window.

"However," I continued, as I turned towards her, "I am not ever

likely to be his enemy, so his little idiosyncrasies don't interest me much."

"And I," remarked Mabel more cheerfully, "shall be married before he is back in England. Let us talk of something else."

II.

A TANGLED WEB

OWING to my absence from town on a cricketing tour, I saw nothing of my brother and his bride till some months after their wedding. The few letters I received from him betrayed an ecstasy which is only pardonable in the recently married. I was glad he was happy, for with all his faults I am fond of him. The laws of primogeniture had given him the bulk of the family property, but, to make up for this, he had always acted towards me with more than brotherly generosity.

When I got back to town I found awaiting me one of those ornate letter-cards which notify the days on which a bride is at home to her friends. My first free afternoon happening to coincide with one of these days, I turned my steps in the direction of my brother's house. As I walked down Brook Street I saw someone wave a parasol violently from the window of a brougham, and I heard a female voice calling on the coachman to stop. On recognizing Mabel's mother as the owner of the parasol, I crossed the road to speak to her.

"You're back, are you?" the old lady cried as I approached. "What a stranger you are! Have you seen Mabel yet?"

"I am just on my way," I replied.

"It's no good going to-day," she responded. "I've just come from her. She says she's ill."

"Ill?"

"Nothing at all, or only a headache. Probably eaten something that doesn't agree with her."

"This is one of her reception days, isn't it?"

Mrs. Fielders nodded. "Very silly of Mabel. Quite well, really. Hundreds being turned from the door. Not that they mind. Probably very glad."

"I had better call," I said.

When I reached my brother's house the footman received me with a cordial smile. I am inclined to think my prowess on the cricketing field commends me to his class. He told me that my brother was out and Lady Trewint was ill, but he would take up my name in case—

A message was brought that Mabel would make a great effort to see me. I settled down for a quiet read, for, knowing Mabel, I guessed the "effort" meant putting on a becoming dress. Half an hour elapsed before I received the expected summons to repair to her boudoir. When I entered she was stretched on a couch in a picturesque attitude, with

a look of profound melancholy on her face. She put out her hand languidly.

"I am very ill," she said plaintively. "So very, very ill. On the whole, I think I should like to die."

"Is it so bad?" I asked sympathetically. "But, to tell the truth, I have never seen you look better."

"Really?" she asked, not altogether displeased. "I assure you I feel perfectly worn out."

"You look charming, nevertheless."

I know few so susceptible to compliments as Mabel. She brightened up at once. Raising herself on her elbow, she screwed her head round in the direction of the door. "Is it shut?"

"Yes."

She sank back on her cushions and put a lace handkerchief to her eyes. "Oh Fred," she wailed, "I am most miserable."

"Bless me, has Gerald——"

"Gerald is a dear," she responded severely.

"Oh, I thought that perhaps——"

"Certainly not. Oh, I wish all men were as kind as Gerald. But they are not. Some men are—brutes!"

I waited for an explanation.

"Nothing will induce me to tell you," she said at length.

"To tell me what?"

"What has upset me so terribly."

"Your mother thinks that you have been eating something that——"

She interrupted me with a little, shocked cry of protest.

"Mamma always says those horrid things. Oh, no, it's much worse than that."

"A mental worry?" I suggested.

She assented. "And I don't know what on earth I shall do. What will Gerald think? And everybody will laugh and say ill-natured things. I sha'n't dare to show my face. Oh, it is wicked, wicked!"

I drew my chair in closer. "Once you promised to be my sister. And when you are in trouble, should you not confide in your brother?"

She looked at me doubtfully. "Oh, no, I simply can't tell you," she said at length. "You might tell Gerald."

"Certainly not," I replied firmly. "He is the last person in the world I should tell."

"Oh, no, I can't tell you." At the same time, however, she fumbled beneath her cushions and drew forth a pretty little booklet in a white parchment cover, ornamented with blue ribbons.

"What is that?" I asked curiously.

She thrust it back amongst the cushions. "You didn't see? Oh, I hope you didn't see."

"I saw nothing."

She drew forth the book again very slowly. "Promise me you won't look inside."

"Very well."

She handed it to me, and then buried her face amongst the cushions. "Isn't it awful?" she moaned.

I took the little book in my hands and fixed my eye-glass. On the white cover, in old English letters, printed in gold, were the words,

"THE LOVE-LETTERS OF MISS MABEL FIELDS, NOW LADY TREWINT," and underneath, in smaller characters, "For private circulation only."

"Whatever does this mean?"

"Oh, I am so miserable!" came in muffled accents from the cushions.

The thought in my mind was that Gerald, from imbecile admiration of his wife's literary style, had printed her letters to him, and was about to circulate them amongst his friends. But this seemed too absurd to be possible.

"Did Gerald do this?" I asked.

"Gerald!" She raised her head and looked at me with eyes round with amazement. "As if Gerald——" Then the tension relaxed, and she dropped back upon her cushions. "Gerald is quite right," she remarked pityingly, "you *are* stupid."

"Perhaps I am," I replied, rather annoyed. "But you leave too much to my intelligence. I assume this pamphlet contains your letters to Gerald?"

"No, it doesn't," she answered tartly.

"It contains your letters, however?"

She did not answer, but there was no denial on her face.

"Love-letters of yours, but not to—Gerald?"

"Oh, dear; oh, dear!"

"May I read them?"

"Oh, no; on no account." Her face flamed suddenly to the color of a brilliant sunset.

"But why have they been printed?"

She began to cry. "To make me miserable," she sobbed. "To make Gerald angry. Oh, it's a shame, a shame!"

"To whom were they written?"

"I don't want to say."

"You must." I think my voice had suddenly become grave. "You must tell me everything. You have written letters you are ashamed of, and someone has got hold of them and printed them. Is it blackmail or revenge or what?"

"Revenge," she replied in a whisper.

"But—but——" A sudden fear possessed me. No one likes the breath of scandal to blow near his home. "Surely, Mabel," I said, "there is nothing in these letters you are really afraid Gerald should see? Gerald is not romantic. He will hardly expect you never to have had little, harmless love-passages before you met him. That would be absurd. Tell me, there is nothing in these letters that would really injure you in Gerald's eyes?"

"Yes, yes; there is," she cried. "There are things I would rather die than let him see. I could never look him in the face again if he read these letters."

I pushed back my chair and rose. "You mean," I said coldly, "that these letters compromise you?"

She looked up tragically. "If by that you mean that they will make me seem wholly absurd and ridiculous, and make everybody scoff and Gerald angry, yes, they compromise me."

I breathed again. "That is all? They will only make you ridiculous. Ridiculous! Who cares for ridicule?"

"I do," said Mabel. "I can't bear to be made a laughing-stock for the world's amusement. You must help me, Fred. I am sorry I said you were not clever, for you are, you know. I am sure you will be able to think of something. Only you mustn't waste time. A copy of this book may be sent to Gerald any day, and then it will be too late to do anything."

"What makes you think that?"

"The book says so. Read the preface—only the preface. It is on the first page."

So I opened the book, and under the heading of "Introductory Note" read as follows:

"The following letters are given to the world from a single-hearted desire to clear the fame of an unhappy lady. Many harsh epithets have been used to describe her conduct, but her letters will show that she has been the victim of a compulsion alike persistent and cruel, which, acting on her gentle nature, has forced her to sacrifice her own and another's happiness. The letters are printed without the knowledge or consent of the writer or of the recipient. By a curious conjunction of circumstances they fell into the hands of a third party, who feels it to be an imperative duty to clear the character of one for whom nothing but the deepest pity can be felt from the accusations of fickleness and inconstancy to which she has been exposed. Copies will be circulated only among the friends and acquaintances of the unfortunate lady, and it is hoped thereby to reinstate her in their good opinion."

I read this through twice, and then a third time.

"I am still in the dark," I said. "Are you the 'unhappy lady'?"

And who is the person desirous of reinstating you in your friends' good opinion?"

Mabel sat up suddenly and her eyes sparkled with anger. "It is all a pretence to say they were printed without the consent of the recipient. How could they fall into the hands of a third party? He has done it himself. I am absolutely sure of it. It is just the thing he would do, the nasty, malicious——"

I interrupted her. "I think I begin to understand, but tell me about it right from the beginning. You needn't mention names, you know, if you don't want to."

She flung a cushion rather violently from her. "Oh," she cried, "I think I could almost kill him if I met him."

"Tell me all about it."

She sat fidgeting for some moments, and then she jumped off the sofa and commenced to walk up and down the room. "He pretended to be in love with me," she began, with an angry sob. "And I—I really did like him. He was so good-looking and nice, and his eyes were quite lovely, and I felt quite sure I was in love with him. He wanted me to marry him, but mother could not bear him."

"Go on."

"Well, at the time I felt I could never love anyone else, and so we got engaged secretly. I never told mother. It was not a real engagement, you know. Once he asked me if I loved him, and I said—I said——"

"Quite so."

"Well, after that he took it for granted we were engaged. And I wrote him one or two stupid letters. But after a month or so I began to feel I didn't like him. Somehow or other he—frightened me. I couldn't understand him. He used to say such strange things, and sometimes there was a curious gleam in his eyes. At last I felt that instead of loving him I simply hated and loathed him so much that I shuddered when he came near. But I didn't dare to tell him, and so I let things drift on, though I had quite made up my mind never to marry him."

"Well?"

"Then, luckily, he had to go abroad, and very soon after I met Gerald. It was at Henley, you remember. What a lovely Henley that was! And you know"—she blushed—"Gerald fell in love with me very quickly."

"That was only to be expected," I observed; "but please go on."

"Of course, I ought to have told Gerald I was in a way engaged to—to the other one. But I didn't." She looked at me appealingly. "I am a terrible coward. But I wrote; oh, yes, I wrote as soon as your brother showed that—that he cared for me."

"Oh, you wrote to the other man?"

"Yes. He was far away,—in Australia, as a matter of fact,—and was not to be back for some months. It was rather difficult to write—so awkward to explain!"

"It must have been."

"However, I never dreamt anyone but he would see my letter. I never thought he would print it in a book! If I had only thought that——"

"You would have written quite differently?"

"Quite," she replied naïvely. "You see what a difficult position I was in. I didn't want him to think I was jilting him. I thought it would be ever so much better to pretend that——"

"That you were being forced into the marriage?"

"Well, yes. How clever of you to guess that! I thought it would be ever so much nicer for him. It would hurt his pride to feel that I had thrown him over. Oh," she cried in a sudden gust, "I did it all for the best!"

"And so——"

"And so I pretended that mamma — poor, dear mamma — was forcing me to marry your brother, and I pretended I hated Gerald, and still loved—the other man. It was really very difficult, but I felt sure it was for the best."

"And all your letters are in this book?"

"Every one," she sighed. "They read so dreadfully in print. I had no idea I had put it so strongly. Whatever would Gerald think, especially as I rather pressed on our marriage. I had to, you know. It would have been horrid if the other man had come rushing home before we had got married."

"It would have been inconvenient."

"Luckily, Gerald was as anxious as I was to get the wedding over. So that turned out all right. Oh, dear,"—she drew a deep breath,—"you have no idea how worried I have been."

"I can imagine," I said, "that your worries are not over."

She gave me a frightened look. "Oh, you must put a stop to these books being circulated. You must get hold of them and burn them. You must get back the original letters. You must——"

"More easily said than done."

"Oh Fred, dear, you will do this for me?" The tears were in her eyes, and she spoke so pleadingly that I agreed to do my best.

"All the same," I said judiciously, "the best course will be to tell Gerald all about it."

"Oh, no." She shook her head decisively. "You see, Gerald is so serious-minded. Of course, I quite see I may have to tell him; but,

oh, I want you to arrange things so that it will not be necessary. I am sure you can. I have such confidence in you."

"Have you, indeed?" I observed rather grimly. It is pleasant to excite confidence, but it has its drawbacks. "You haven't mentioned the man's name, but I have guessed it."

She turned towards me excitedly. "Tell me what you think of him? Hasn't he acted in a low, disgraceful manner?"

"He has certainly not acted like a gentleman." In my heart I was full of indignation towards Trefusis. "Of course, we have no proof that the letters were not printed as stated in the preface."

"Nonsense!" she cried. "It is just his deceitful way of injuring me without personal responsibility."

"I agree," I replied thoughtfully. "But it is rather ingenious. Has he written or spoken to you since your marriage?"

"Not a single word. I have not even seen him."

I rose. "Well, Mabel, I must think it over. It is a jolly awkward mix-up. At the same time, I don't believe Trefusis will send these books round to your friends. The pretext that they were sent out by a third party is rather weak, and he must realize that people would not believe it."

"Would he mind whether they believed it or not?"

"I think so. It would be considered a dirty trick, and he would be cut by all decent people. Very likely the committee of his club would give him a hint to clear out. Altogether, he would ultimately be the loser. Now, Trefusis is always careful of his own skin, I've noticed."

"Then you think——"

"I feel sure his motive is merely to worry and distress you. I don't believe he will let Gerald see these letters—not at present, at any rate. That would bring things to an issue, and I am certain that is not what he wants."

"If Gerald does not see them, I don't care a bit. Oh," she went on, clasping her hands, "just think of Gerald reading all my rubbish about not loving him, and being forced to marry him against my will, and all that. What would he think of me?"

"The whole business is really very unpleasant. The fear of disclosure will always be hanging over your head, and you will feel that you are at this man's mercy. I really do advise you to tell Gerald."

"I can't; I won't!"

I walked about the room rather irritably. "I hate the idea of my brother's wife being in the power of another man, especially of a man like Trefusis."

"Help me to get out of his power."

"Yes, yes; I am going to try, of course. But really, Mabel, I cannot help feeling that your conduct——"

"Oh," she cried plaintively, "now you are going to scold me. I know I deserve it; still, I have been terribly punished, and—and——" She produced her handkerchief.

"Well, don't cry. And now I must go. Good-by, Mabel."

She took my hand. "Thank you so very, very much. And oh, Fred, on no account fight or hit him. That will mean a scandal, and the whole thing will come out. Don't rely on brute force, Fred."

"I must do what I can," I returned, much out of humor. "Good-by again."

"Good-by, dear Fred."

III.

MORE WORRY

On leaving my brother's house I strolled leisurely in the direction of my club. Just as I had agreed with a friend to play a "hundred up," a waiter came to tell me I was wanted at the telephone. I went to the instrument to discover my brother at the other end.

"Is that you, Fred?" said he.

"Yes. How are you? Called on you this afternoon, but——"

"Very busy. Bill in Committee. Most interesting discussion. By the way, how is Mabel?"

"Oh, much better."

"Fred, Fred, are you there? I want you to—No, we are *not* finished—I want you to get in a cab and come here."

"Where is 'here'?"

"The House."

"Oh, oh; yes."

"John Telby has just been to see me. He wants——"

"Who the deuce is John Telby?"

"Really, Fred, you are shockingly ignorant. He owns the engineering works at Trewint. You *must* know."

"Oh, yes; of course."

"No, we are *not* finished—He is standing for Trewint, you know. Renton has accepted a judgeship. I want to introduce you to him."

"Oh, I don't want to know him."

"Really, Fred, you are most—Do go away and don't worry—aggravating. He wants me to go down and make a speech in his favor, but it's absurd. I simply can't."

"Oh, why not? I thought you rather liked making speeches."

"I can't hear what you say. I am up to my eyes in work, and, besides, it isn't quite the thing for Ministers to take part in bye-elections. But I agree with him it is desirable the family influence should be used in his favor. So you must go down and take the chair at some of his meetings."

"Oh, hang it all!"

"Yes, Fred; I must insist. I know you are unfit, and will probably make a perfect exhibition of yourself, but——"

"Really, Gerald!" I protested.

"I say;—are you there, Fred?—On the whole, perhaps you had better not come to the House. I shall be too occupied to talk to you even if you do come."

"In these circumstances, I won't come."

"Look here, Fred, Telby and his daughter, and his son too, I think, are dining with us to-morrow. Turn up, will you? Dinner at eight. Do you hear, Fred?"

"Yes, I hear, but——"

"Good-by." And then the bell rang off.

I left the telephone decidedly ruffled. There seemed to be a general conspiracy against my innocent desire for a peaceful life. I dislike politics; I loathe elections; I hate being brought into violent conflict with other men. The thought of taking the night-train for the Continent crossed my mind; but, of course, I could not leave Mabel in her dilemma. And if I stayed in town, I knew perfectly well I should be at Trewint before the month was out, endeavoring, no doubt feebly, to preserve order at rowdy meetings, and making speeches on matters that interested me not the least.

Then it was borne on me that if I was to be carted off to Trewint forthwith as a shining exemplar of the family greatness, I must deal at once with Mabel's imbroglio. However, even if I had to make haste, there was still time for a "hundred up." I returned to my game and played abominably.

IV.

IN OPEN CONFLICT

LATE in the afternoon of the next day I hailed a cab and told the man to drive to the Albany. The only course that presented itself to my mind was to call on Trefusis and ask him to hand over the letters. I was hardly sanguine enough to expect that he would do so, but in any case he would have to do or say something; and on his act or word, whatever it might be, must depend my future action.

On reaching the Albany I dismissed the cab and made my way slowly to Trefusis's chambers.

After a short interval the door was opened by a man-servant.

"Is Mr. Trefusis in?"

"No, sir."

"When will he be back?"

"I expect him every moment, sir."

"I'll wait."

The man held the door wide for me to enter, and I crossed the threshold. There was a pleased smile of recognition on his face, and

so much cordiality in his manner that I fixed my eye-glass and scrutinized him carefully.

"Think I've seen you before," I observed.

"Oh, yes, sir; certainly, sir." The fellow positively beamed.

"Where?"

"I come from Trewint, sir. I hope Sir Gerald and her Ladyship are quite well?"

"Oh, yes." I looked at him again. "Why, bless me," I exclaimed, with sudden recognition, "you're surely old Tarling's son?"

"Yes, Master Fred." His smile was full-drawn.

"And how is your father?"

"Dead, sir, these two years."

"Oh, oh, yes, of course. I remember how sorry I was to hear of it. Let me see, weren't you a great cricketer?"

His smile, which had contracted at the mention of his father, expanded again.

"Not so good as you was, Master Fred."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"I don't know whether you remember the last time we played together for the town, Master Fred, about three years ago?"

"Why, of course." I am afraid the details had rather escaped me, but they were evidently fresh in young Tarling's memory.

"You and me," he went on, simply bubbling over with delight at the recollection, "had forty-six to knock up to win the match, and we did it!"

"Why, so we did," I echoed. "It is a curious coincidence," I continued meditatively, "that you should be in Mr. Trefusis's service."

The young fellow's face clouded. "I have only been here since Mr. Trefusis came back from Australia, and——"

I saw he was going to tell me of some of his troubles with his master, and I tried to stop him.

"Well, Tarling," I said, "I hope you will get on well. I am pleased to see you again." I glanced at my watch. "I don't think I will wait any longer."

"I hope, sir, you won't think it a liberty," he began with some embarrassment, "but I'm not very comfortable here, and if you was to hear of anything——"

"I'll bear you in mind." I got up rather abruptly. The temptation to use the man was becoming irresistible. He was a decent young fellow, and a discreet reference to the facts, coupled perhaps with an offer of employment, would cause him to espouse my cause with enthusiasm. What a blessing to get hold of the letters without trouble or anxiety! Yet—yet—I stood and looked at him doubtfully.

"You don't get on well with Mr. Trefusis?" I said at length.

"I don't like him," he blurted out, "or his ways. There are lots of funny things go on——"

"Stop, stop," I cried, thoroughly ashamed. What "shocking form" to go to a man's rooms and listen to the tittle-tattle of his valet! After all, even though I were dealing with a man whom I disliked and distrusted, there were surely meannesses of which I must not be guilty.

I was going towards the door when I heard the sound of a key in the lock. "I think I hear Mr. Trefusis," I said, and returned to my seat. Tarling left the room, and in a few minutes Trefusis came in, breezy, buoyant, and full of regrets.

"So awfully sorry, my dear chap! If I had only known you intended to call! It's very kind of you to come. Why, I haven't seen you for years."

"Not for some little time," I responded stiffly.

"You know," he went on, with a note of regret in his voice, "how in London one drifts away from one's friends. We seem to have got into different sets." He tossed his gloves on the table, sat down on the arm of a chair, and looked at me with eyes in which I could trace no shadow of embarrassment. He seemed to be possessed of a single-hearted desire to make me feel at ease. His dark, handsome face expressed nothing but pleasure; his manner was that of a frank, unspoiled boy in the presence of a comrade.

"No," I said slowly, "since we left Oxford we have not often met. Perhaps we have not much in common."

He made an easy, deprecating movement.

"Oh, I don't know," he answered. "It is difficult to explain why we have seen so little of each other. It just happened." He smiled his ready, happy, good-natured smile. "Anyhow, it's good of you to look me up. Look here, won't you have something?—whiskey, tea, anything?"

"No, thanks. In fact, you make me ashamed to say that my call is hardly a social one. I came on a small matter of business."

"Business?" His face assumed an expression of courteous interest. "I wonder what 'business' we can have together. Somehow, the term doesn't seem applicable in connection with you."

"Why?"

"Oh, I hardly know, except that I thought you regarded all business as far too unpleasant to concern yourself with."

"I am afraid this particular business is unpleasant, but, nevertheless, I must concern myself with it."

"Strange, indeed." His curiosity did not seem excited; he produced his cigarette-case and offered it to me. I declined; he selected a cigarette and lit it.

"Sometimes," I said, "one is obliged to intervene in matters that

do not directly concern oneself. What I have come to see you about is a case in point. I can hardly imagine myself troubling you on my own account."

"No trouble, I assure you. Quite charmed to be of any service."

I wanted to tell this man that I considered he was a blackguard, but I found it very difficult.

"If I may take that as a promise, I need not detain you more than five minutes," I said. "You hold some letters written by my sister-in-law, Lady Trewint. I want them, please."

His face assumed an expression of concern. "My dear fellow——" he began.

"There are also some printed copies of these letters in your possession," I went on. "These too I want."

"Printed copies!" he ejaculated. "Whatever can you mean?"

"Pray do not let us waste time. I am dining out this evening, and have to get back to my chambers to dress."

"I too am dining out, and I also have to dress. But I am afraid I must trouble you for some explanation of this very curious demand."

I tapped with my knuckles on the table. "I want the letters written to you by my sister-in-law."

"So you said just now."

"And the prints of these letters."

"You repeat yourself again."

"Do you decline to give them up?"

He rose from the elbow of the armchair on which he had been sitting, and, sauntering to the fireplace, knocked off the ash of his cigarette meditatively. Then he turned.

"Trewint," he said, "I do not want to take offence unnecessarily, but there is a peremptoriness about your request which I rather resent. At the same time, I understand you are here as the representative of a lady for whom—it is useless to deny it—I have a very warm feeling. That in itself is sufficient to make me overlook what otherwise I might be inclined to take in bad part. But I cannot understand what you mean when you talk about printed copies. Tell me what you mean?"

"What I mean," I said steadily, "is that the letters my sister-in-law wrote to you have been printed. A copy of the print was sent to her with a veiled threat to send copies to her husband and her friends."

A shocked exclamation came from Trefusis. "I can't believe it!" he exclaimed.

"You may take it as true," I responded coldly. My belief in his guilt was so great that if an angel had descended from heaven to assure me that I was mistaken I should have discredited the celestial messenger.

"And you think—you actually think—that I——"

"Yes, I do."

"And Mabel—does Mabel——" His voice broke. "I am sure Mabel does not think that I——"

"Yes, she does."

"It is utterly monstrous; wickedly, shamefully untrue! Am I the man to do an act of that kind?"

"Well, candidly," I replied, "I rather think you are."

He turned on me, his eyes ablaze with anger. "How dare you come here—to my own rooms—and insult me?" His hand went towards the bell.

"Why," said I, "do you not hand me the letters?"

He drew his hand back from the bell. "Because—of course, you will not believe me—I have not got them."

"Where are they, then?"

"I have lost them." Anguish seemed to choke his utterance. He turned and leant against the mantel-piece, his face resting on his arms.

I was silent for a moment, and then incredulity repossessed me.

"Surely, that is pretty thin," I observed.

My words seemed to sting him. He drew himself up and faced me.

"Thin or not thin, it is the truth."

"Where did you lose them?"

"They were lost on my return journey from Australia. All her letters I carried about with me everywhere. I—loved her." His head dropped on his breast; his attitude was that of a broken-hearted man. "I daresay you know we were engaged to be married, and then—and then she broke off our engagement by letter. I hastened back to find her—already married." He covered his face with his hands.

It was very unpleasant. Even an actor can move by the semblance of suffering. I declined to allow myself to believe that he was not acting, yet a little imp of doubt was beginning to torment me.

"You lost them, you say?" I tried to put incredulity into my voice.

"Yes, I lost them. They were in my dressing-bag. It was stolen."

"Indeed?"

"Oh," he cried, with a sudden access of passion, "of course, you don't believe me. I do not care whether you believe me or not. But I do care that Mabel should think that I could injure her! I would die for her, even to-day, even at this moment, if I could!" He flung out his arms. "And it hurts—my God, it hurts!—that she should think that I could act so shamefully."

"What possible object could anyone but yourself have in printing these letters?" I asked weakly.

"What object could I have?" he cried, raising his head for a moment.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Revenge, I suppose."

"Revenge! Revenge on Mabel—whom I love!" He let his face drop again into his hands. For some moments we were both silent.

"Of course," I said, speaking with great deliberation, "if, by any chance, I have done you an injustice, I shall do my utmost to repair the injury."

"I care nothing for what you have said or done," he answered bitterly, "but I shall not rest until I have proved to Mabel that I am not the cur she thinks me. By Heaven! if I could discover the man who had been trying to blackmail her——"

"Blackmail?" I said quickly. "That is how you explain it?"

He regarded me with weary eyes. "It is obvious," he said, "that the letters have fallen into the hands of some blackguard, who, seeing they were love-letters addressed to a man who is not her husband, is endeavoring to make money out of them. There is no great mystery about it."

I looked at him steadily, but he did not flinch. I sighed, and turned away.

"I wish to Heaven I could tell whether you are lying or not. But I confess I cannot."

"You may insult me as much as you like to-day. I am too much upset to resist. But I swear that if any other man ever speaks to me as you have spoken, I will——" He did not finish his sentence, but sank dejectedly into an armchair.

I turned towards him half compassionately.

"What shall I say to you, Trefusis, if I have made a mistake?"

The softened tone in my voice seemed to appeal to him, for he looked up wistfully.

"Do you believe me innocent?"

I hesitated.

"You do not," he said sadly, "and neither will Mabel. It is hard, hard."

My heart was touched; I was about to put all my doubts aside and assure him I was conscious of having deeply wronged him, when my eye fell on a safe that stood in the corner of the room.

"Do you wish to convince me of your innocence?" I asked, for a sudden thought had flashed across my mind.

"I will do anything in my power to do so," he replied earnestly.

"Then," said I, "lend me your keys, and let me open that safe."

The suggestion took him by surprise, and for the first time in the course of our interview there was something in his manner that struck me as inconsistent with his protestations. The dejected expression vanished from his face, and his forehead was furrowed with a frown. For some moments he did not speak.

"I have not the keys," he replied at length. "They are in my strong-room at the Safe Deposit Company's."

Inherently, this did not sound very probable. Like many men, he wore a key-chain, as I could see.

"Lend me your bunch of keys, and let me test the truth of that assertion."

He sprang to his feet. "Confound you," he cried, "you go a step too far! How many times am I to be told I am a liar in my own rooms?"

"You desired to convince me that you were not a liar. Here is the test. Lend me your keys."

"I will not," he cried. "Leave my room. I have stood your impertinence long enough."

"Give me," I said, "my sister-in-law's letters, which are in that safe."

"Leave my chambers this instant!"

"I want those letters first."

He controlled himself suddenly. "I do not wish to put you to any unnecessary indignity, Trewint, but unless you leave these rooms, I shall tell my servant to turn you out."

My blood was getting up. "You must give me those letters; for, by Heaven! I will not leave till I have them."

He crossed to the bell, and I clinched my fists and waited. He pressed the knob, and I could hear the "trill" in a remote part of the chambers. His face was pale, but his composure had returned as suddenly as mine had left me.

"Surely we are not to indulge in a vulgar fracas?" he said. "What possible good can it do you to be thrown out by brute force?"

"Give me those letters," I answered stubbornly, "and I'll go quietly enough."

"Aren't you behaving rather stupidly?" There was a note of indulgent contempt in his voice. "You come to ask me for certain documents. I tell you with sincere regret that they have been stolen from me. You beg leave to ransack my private safe with the benevolent intention of proving me a liar. Not unnaturally, I decline to give way to your folly. You then refuse to leave my rooms and make a scene, having to be pitched out by my servant. And the steps are stone," he added.

"I am not pitched out yet," I replied grimly. But I confess that it was dawning on me that I was making a fool of myself. Whether the letters were in the safe or not, I was not in the least increasing my chance of getting them. Why should I fight with a servant? And yet my pride—so foolish is pride—made it difficult for me to give way.

At that moment the door opened and Tarling entered. I had

entirely forgotten my conversation with him, but as soon as I saw his face I remembered it. It was not unlikely he would decline to engage in a scuffling-match with me.

"Tarling," Trefusis ordered, "show Mr. Trewint the door."

"Tarling," said I, "your master is a scoundrel."

Tarling stood at the door with his mouth slightly open.

"Show Mr. Trewint out," Trefusis continued in an even voice, "or if he will not go, I must ask you to put him out. But do not use unnecessary violence." He took out his cigarette-case and fingered another cigarette.

"Tarling," said I, "listen to me. A lady who is a relation of mine wrote your master some letters. He thinks——"

"Are you seriously proposing to make my servant a confidant?" asked Trefusis, with amused wonder in his voice.

I took no notice of his interruption. "He thinks the letters are compromising, and because the lady got tired of him and married someone else, he is threatening to show her letters to her husband. He has even had them printed to send to her friends. Is not that the act of a blackguard?"

Tarling stood motionless, save that his mouth opened wider.

"I fear you are not interesting my man," observed Trefusis sarcastically. "Tarling, turn this fool out."

"Tarling," I began for the third time, "the lady has asked me to help her. The letters are in that safe. The keys are in your master's pockets. Help me to get them."

Trefusis laughed. "Really, you have the most astounding insolence! Tarling, kick this fellow out of my room; or, if you are afraid, go and fetch a policeman." He glanced at the clock. "Hurry up, man, or I shall be late for dinner."

Tarling smiled feebly and scratched his head. Then his mouth shut and he advanced into the room. Trefusis had turned away indifferently and was lighting his cigarette. My eye caught Tarling's, and I saw from the answering gleam that he had decided to throw in his lot with me.

"Now then, Tarling——" began Trefusis, hardly deigning to look round. The next moment the arms of his servant were round him with a grip of iron.

"Now, Master Fred, you can get at his keys," said Tarling.

"Can you hold him all right?" I cried, hastening towards him.

"Master Fred," echoed Trefusis. "So you know him, do you? Damn you, Trewint, have you been nobbling my servant?"

"Have you got them?" asked Tarling.

"Yes, yes." I had hauled the keys by their chain from Trefusis's pocket and had detached the bunch. I crossed to the safe and began

testing the various keys in the lock. Trefusis had given over struggling, for Tarling had twisted his arms behind him in such a way that any movement meant agony. His face was livid, and there was a vindictive look in his eyes. When I glanced in his direction I could see Tarling's face, like a harvest moon, over his shoulder.

Undoubtedly I was feeling rather excited. My fingers trembled as I tried the keys in turn. At length I found one that turned the lock.

"Please remember," cried Trefusis, "that you are committing a criminal act. You and your confederate are rendering yourselves liable to penal servitude."

"You alarm me," I replied with indifference. I had opened the door of the safe and was peering in vaguely at the books and papers it contained. "By the way, Tarling, did a parcel come from a printer's a week or so ago?"

Tarling thought. "I remember a parcel coming from Glasgow, because I had to pay on it."

"Can you see it here?"

Tarling urged his master across the room.

"That looks like it on the left," he said.

I hauled out the packet indicated. It was tied up roughly with string. I placed it on the table and proceeded to unfasten a knot.

"If you open that parcel I will prosecute you," cried Trefusis rather wildly.

I took no notice. The brown paper fell aside and disclosed about fifty replicas of the booklet I had seen in Mabel's hands.

I turned to Trefusis. "Oh you liar!" His face was white and drawn, and even at the moment I felt a vague stirring of compassion. He uttered not a word.

"Is that all you want?" asked Tarling.

"Where are the originals?"

"What's that there amongst the little books?" asked Tarling, jerking his chin towards a bulky envelope. I hastily tore it open.

"Right," said I; "here they are, and the receipted bill for the printing. That may be useful." I slipped the packet into my pocket and roughly tied up the bigger parcel. "That's all I want. The next thing is to clear out."

"I can't stay here, sir, after all this," observed Tarling.

"No, of course you can't. You must come along with me. And I think you can let go Mr. Trefusis's arms. I've got what I want, and I certainly sha'n't let go of it."

Tarling relinquished his hold, and Trefusis, after standing for a moment regarding us with a scowl of hate, flung himself into a chair.

"If you've got what you want," he said sullenly, "go away. But you will certainly hear from me."

"Come along, Tarling." I tucked the parcel comfortably under my arm and put on my hat. Suddenly the bell rang.

"Damn!" I exclaimed. Trefusis started to attention, and then made a sudden dash for the door.

"Stop him!" I shouted. Tarling made a long reach, collared him, and flung him back upon the sofa.

The bell rang again.

"Help!" shouted Trefusis. "Help! help!"

"Come," said I to Tarling, "we must get out of this. Is there any other way out save through the front door?"

"No, sir," answered Tarling. "Shall I answer the door and say Mr. Trefusis is not at home?"

"Good idea! No, hang it! the man outside must have heard Trefusis shouting. We had better go straight out and trust our luck."

"Yes, sir," said Tarling.

"And you had better lock Mr. Trefusis in this room and bring the key away with you."

"Yes, sir."

"Good-by, Trefusis!" I said. We went out, and Trefusis, dashing forward, tried to force his way past us, but a violent push from Tarling sent him reeling back into the room. Tarling locked the door and then went for his hat. The bell continued to ring, and, to add to the noise, Trefusis commenced to batter at the panels of the door with his fists, shouting loudly for help.

"Are you ready?" said I to Tarling, when he had returned.

"Yes, sir."

"Open the door, then."

He flung it open. A young man in evening dress stood outside, evidently in a state of alarm.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" he quavered.

"Of what?" I asked.

"Of—of that shouting?"

"Oh, that!" I answered. "It is merely Mr. Trefusis. Pray walk in. He will be most pleased to see you."

But he hesitated. "I do not understand——" he began.

"He will explain," I replied in a friendly tone. "The story will amuse you very much."

"But really," he stammered, "I hear Mr. Trefusis calling out 'Thieves!'"

"If you will accompany me," I said, "I will tell you the details of this amusing incident as we walk along. I am sure it will interest you. But I cannot stay, for I am in a great hurry. Or perhaps you would prefer to go inside and let Mr. Trefusis tell you in his own words."

"I—I—must insist on a proper explanation."

I shook my head smilingly. "Then you must get it from Mr. Trefusis, for I really can't stop." And I commenced to descend the stairs, Tarling following me. The battering at the door and the shouts for assistance increased in vehemence. The young man looked with hesitation at us disappearing from his view, and then he regarded dubiously the open door of the flat. So we left him, evidently greatly at a loss as to the course to be pursued.

"If that young man makes up his mind to shout to the porter to stop us before we get out of the place, we shall be awkwardly situated," I observed.

"Yes, sir."

"But if we can get into a cab while he is fluctuating, I am really not alarmed about the future."

"No, sir."

"At the same time, to hurry will only attract attention."

"Yes, sir."

"It is lucky, is it not, Tarling, that that young man is of the flutter-brained class?"

"Yes, sir."

By this time we had reached the ground floor, and we walked quietly out into Burlington Gardens.

"Call a cab," I said to Tarling, and he did so. We got in, and I told the cabman to drive to my chambers.

"After all, there was no need for hurry," said I, drawing, at the same time, a breath of relief. I leant back in the cab with a feeling of complacency. "The truth is, Tarling, the odds are in favor of a man who can keep his head."

"Yes, sir."

"If we had rushed down the staircase, red-faced and wild-eyed, the porter would have stopped us. As it is, he did not raise his head from his newspaper as we passed."

"No, sir."

I glanced at a clock in Bond Street. "By Jove, half-past seven, and I'm due at my brother's at eight. I shall have to hurry. Tarling, I take you into my employment. At present an elderly widow lady who has seen better days gives me my breakfast and cleans out my rooms. At any rate, she says she does. But there is no reason why I should not have a valet. You would like to enter my service, wouldn't you, Tarling?"

"Oh, yes, sir." He beamed at the suggestion.

The cab stopped, and I jumped out. Telling the cabman to wait, I ran upstairs to my rooms and hastily dressed. In less than a quarter of an hour I was ready to start.

I locked up the parcel of ribbon-bedecked booklets and put the letters into my pocket; and then I jumped into my cab, and, feeling at peace with all mankind, arrived with a few minutes in hand at my brother's house.

V.

MOLLY

WHEN I entered the drawing-room I found Mabel and her mother alone.

"I was afraid I was going to be late," I said as I shook hands. "Where's everybody?"

"Gerald has gone down to the wine-cellar," said Mabel. "He trusts no one with the keys, not even me. I suppose he thinks I am still too recent. And the Telbys haven't turned up yet."

"How are you?" asked Mrs. Fielders, nodding affably from the sofa. "Mabel looks all right, doesn't she? I suppose you didn't see her yesterday when you called?"

"Oh, yes, I did," I answered.

"Fred is quite the cause of my return to health," observed Mabel. "He is so comforting." Then she looked towards me, and her eyes framed a mute interrogation. I nodded gently in response.

"Oh Fred," she cried suddenly, "did I ever show you the lovely vases the tenantry at Trewint gave us?" She led the way into the back drawing-room, and I followed.

"What news?" she asked in a whisper.

"I have your letters. Here they are."

She seized them, and her eyes sparkled.

"Thank you, Fred, so much,—so very much. Oh Fred, you are a dear!"

At that moment we heard Gerald's voice, and she thrust the letters into her pocket. We went back again into the other room.

"Well, Fred, how are you?" asked my brother, rather preoccupiedly.

"All right, thanks."

"I can't understand why those Telbys don't come. It is exceedingly bad form to be late."

"They are only five minutes behind time, dear," said his wife soothingly.

"Five minutes late is five minutes late," her husband responded oracularly. Then he turned to me. "By the way, Fred, I must particularly beg you not to annoy Mr. Telby."

"Why, certainly not," said I, rather astonished. "Why should I?"

"He is a very serious-minded man. Pray try and check your flippant nonsense. It annoys me, but it will disgust him."

I shrugged my shoulders. Mrs. Fielders gave a little cry of protest.

"Oh, my dear Gerald, we shall all be bored to death. I was relying on Fred to entertain us."

"Fred does not entertain me," returned my brother severely. "I confess nothing distresses me so much as having to listen to his perverted views on things in general. They may pass as witty with foolish people——"

"Like me," interposed Mrs. Fielders. "Fred, let us comfort each other. Your brother has broken both our heads."

Gerald went on. "Mr. Telby is a man with matured convictions. He comes of a Nonconformist family who were, without exception, stanch Radicals. He retains his religious views, but after a careful study of political questions, he has become a strong upholder of Conservative opinions. This does him every credit."

"A Dissenter by birth, and a Conservative by conviction!" exclaimed Mrs. Fielders. "Everything points to a pleasant evening."

"Didn't somebody say his daughter was coming?" I asked idly. "What is she like?"

Mabel broke in. "Oh Fred, you know the Telbys are enormously wealthy. It really would be a good thing if you got to like the girl. She is very handsome, and would make a splendid wife."

"Not having any brains," put in Mrs. Fielders. "My dear boy, don't marry a clever woman. My husband did, and always regretted it."

"I didn't know your husband married twice," said Gerald. He was fidgeting about the room, continually glancing at his watch. "But it is no good advising Fred to adopt a sensible course. It only incites him to take the opposite way. Besides, I do not believe Mr. Telby would allow his daughter to marry anyone save a man of intellect and character."

"I must see the lady before I decide definitely," I replied lightly to turn the conversation. My brother was certainly in his least amiable mood.

"And she will have to see you, which is another impediment. It is no good, Mabel, you had better give up your scheme."

"Why, Gerald," she cried, "it was you who made the suggestion originally."

"Perhaps I did," he snapped, "but I have a conscience, after all. The girl has never injured me. Fifteen minutes! Intolerable, utterly intolerable!"

Luckily, at that moment Mr. Telby and his daughter were announced. He bustled in, a short, thick-set man, with a strong chin that seemed to betoken tremendous determination, and a deep bass voice, which vibrated through the room like a gong. Behind him came his daughter; and when my eyes fell on her face I had difficulty

in withdrawing them. She was tall, and carried herself well. Her face was absolutely perfect in its queenly beauty. For the moment I had the sensation of repressing a tendency to gasp.

"I am sorry I am so late," said Mr. Telby in his deep voice, "but I waited for my son. It was arranged he should call for us at the hotel." He glanced round the room. "Has he not arrived?"

"No," said Mabel pleasantly, as she shook hands with the newcomers. "He hasn't come yet. But you are not a bit late. Let me introduce you to my mother; and this is Mr. Fred Trewint."

Mr. Telby shook hands, with his eyes far from mine. "It is strange, isn't it? Molly, where can Gilbert be?"

Her name was Molly! I touched the hand she extended, and a thrill ran through me. But what a stupid name for so regal a creature!

"Oh," she replied, "I daresay he has forgotten all about his engagement. You know, papa, he didn't want to come."

Mrs. Fielders's eyes went up, and Mabel, for a single moment, showed surprise. Mr. Telby coughed and frowned, but the beautiful girl was quite unconscious that she had said anything out of place.

Mabel intervened with her bright smile.

"We won't wait, Mr. Telby. I daresay your son will forgive us. Fred, will you take down Miss Telby?" And we descended to the dining-room.

"I can't imagine where Gilbert is," I heard the father booming. "He is usually so punctual. I can place the utmost reliance on his promises."

"Are you anxious about your brother, Miss Telby?" I asked as we took our seats.

"Anxious? Why should I be anxious?" She turned her wonderful eyes full on me. "What could have happened to him?"

"Perhaps," said I lightly, and solely to say something, "he has been run over by a steam-roller."

It was an exceedingly stupid remark, but surely anyone might be expected to see it was not intended to be taken seriously. The girl looked at me in a startled way, and then she leant in her father's direction.

"Papa," she said in her rich, full voice, that sounded like a distant echo of her father's, "Mr. Trewint is afraid Gilbert has been run over by a steam-roller!"

There was a dead silence, and then Mabel laughed rather forcedly.

"Oh, you mustn't take any notice of what Fred says. He is always talking nonsense."

"Miss Telby misunderstood me," I said hastily. The girl was a perfect idiot.

"But I am really getting quite anxious about Gilbert," she said. "You don't really think an accident has happened to him?"

"No, of course I don't," I replied. "I was only trying to be funny. It was foolish of me."

Her eyes opened a little wider and she sighed gently. "Milly says I have no sense of humor. I often think people are serious when they are not. Humor," she added pathetically, "seems so often to consist of saying what you don't mean."

What a brute I had been to worry this gentle creature!

"My remark wasn't a bit humorous," I replied remorsefully. "It was only silly. But who is Milly?"

Her eyes brightened. "Milly is my younger sister. I am sure you would like her; she is so clever."

"Is she in town with you?"

"Oh, no, she is down at Trewint. You have no idea what an important person she is there. She rushes about all over the county on her bicycle, and looks after people—poor people, I mean. Mr. Vicars often says he would not know what to do without her."

I nodded. "I suppose Mr. Vicars is a parson?"

"He is a minister; the minister of the chapel. Milly teaches in the Sunday-school. She has a class of boys, some of them quite big. They simply adore her."

"And don't you teach in the Sunday-school?" I asked, with a reproving air.

"Oh, no," she replied. "I did try once, but somehow I couldn't think of anything to say. It was really rather horrid for me, and then the children began to giggle. Children are so clever," she added, sighing.

"Is Milly your only sister?" I asked, continuing the conversation, chiefly, I am afraid, that I might have an excuse for keeping my eyes on her face.

"Yes. I have a brother, as you know, the brother you thought had been run over. He is not very clever; none of us are clever except Milly."

"I am not clever either," I told her confidentially. "At least, I am always being told so; and I suppose it must be true."

"Oh, I should think you were clever," she replied. "Aren't you going to help father at the election? He told me you were going to take the chair at his big meetings. You must be clever to be able to do that."

"Anyone can sit in a chair," I replied deprecatingly. "The question is, what shall I do when I am standing up?"

"I am sure you speak splendidly. Everyone thinks so much of the Trewints. Of course, they are the big people in Trewint. Father

was rather disappointed Sir Gerald couldn't come himself, but I am certain you will do just as well."

"I don't think my brother would like to hear you say that," I said laughingly. "But I suppose you will come to the meetings and sit on the platform?"

"Oh, yes."

"When I get into any difficulty I shall turn to you for help. You must sit quite near."

"Oh, no," she cried affrightedly, "you mustn't depend on me to help you. But I am sure Milly will do so. I will tell her."

When dinner was nearly over a knock at the front door betokened a new arrival, and shortly afterwards a footman ushered a young man into the room, at whose advent there was an immediate outburst of little exclamations.

"Why, Gilbert," said Mr. Telby, his voice drowning every other, "how comes it you are so late?"

"I am very sorry," said the young man as he passed round to shake hands with his hostess, "but I—I couldn't help it."

"It doesn't in the least matter," said Mabel. "We are so glad you have come, after all." She indicated the vacant chair, and he sat down.

The room was lit only by the lamps on the table, but as he sat down his face was brought into the circle of light, and I wondered vaguely where I had seen him before.

"I was detained by a most extraordinary affair." He seemed very nervous, and I noticed his hand trembled as he unfolded his serviette.

"Not a steam-roller?" asked his sister breathlessly.

"A steam-roller!" He seemed bewildered. "Oh, no. I ran in for a moment to see a friend of mine before going on to the hotel where, you know, father, I promised to meet you."

"Yes," said Mr. Telby.

"And—and a burglary had just been committed."

"A burglary!" everybody ejaculated except myself, for I recollected where we had met.

"I went round to Trefusis's chambers——"

"Trefusis!" exclaimed Mabel, her face becoming scarlet.

"That is the name of my friend. He lives in the Albany. Just as I got to his door the thieves were coming out. One of them had a bundle under his arm."

"And you stopped them?" said his father. He looked round triumphantly, preparing to glory in his son's achievement.

"N—no. You see, I didn't know they were burglars. They didn't look like it. One was Trefusis's servant, whom I had often seen."

"Was he a confederate?" asked my brother.

"Yes. The other looked like a gentleman,—quite young, and rather good-looking. He spoke to me, but he seemed so self-possessed and cool that I could hardly believe——"

"Of course not," interposed his father. "How in the world could you know? You can't tell instinctively who is and who is not a thief. And there was nothing to raise your suspicions."

"Of course," said young Telby, rather embarrassedly, "I could hear Trefusis shouting."

"Your friend was in his rooms the while?" queried Gerald.

"Yes. You see, it happened like this. The servant showed a man in, who said he wished to see Trefusis on business. Trefusis spoke to him and he was insolent. So Trefusis rang for his servant and told him to turn the fellow out. Instead of doing so, the servant flung his arms round Trefusis and held him fast while the other pulled Trefusis's keys out of his pocket and opened the safe. They took what they wanted and went away, locking Trefusis up in his room."

I stole a glance at Mabel. Her face was absolutely purple, and her eyes were fixed with a fascinated stare on young Telby. She withdrew them with an effort, and they met mine. We both instantly averted our gaze.

"What a very audacious business!" exclaimed my brother. "It is astonishing that such things can happen in London. Did they take anything of value?"

"Only some papers,—some very important papers."

A little, choked exclamation came from Mabel.

"You see, I rang the bell outside, and that disturbed them. Trefusis thinks it is very lucky I came at that moment."

"I have no doubt," said Mr. Telby, with a proud note in his voice, "that you were the means of saving him a great deal, possibly his life."

"Oh, I don't know," said the youth modestly. "I rang the bell several times, and I could get no answer. I could hear movements inside, or I suppose I should have gone away. And then the door opened and the two men came out. I could hear Trefusis shouting, and I asked one of the men what was the meaning of it. He answered, very pleasantly, that he couldn't stop to explain, but that Mr. Trefusis would tell me all about it. Then he nodded in quite a friendly way and went slowly down the stairs. I didn't know what to do."

"Why didn't you stop them and demand an explanation?" asked my brother.

"Well, you see, they were two and I was only one," replied the young man simply. "And, besides, I could hear Trefusis shouting and banging at the door. I thought I ought to go to him first."

"You did quite right," said his father, rather nettled at the sus-

picion thrown on his son's heroism. "You were quite right to go to your friend's assistance. There might have been a third burglar inside, severely injuring him."

"Well," asked Mrs. Fielders, "what happened next?"

"It took a little time to get Trefusis out. We had to break the lock. And then it took some time for him to explain what had happened."

"I suppose you communicated with the police?"

"Trefusis said he would see to that. He was in a tremendous rage, but he said nothing could be done at the minute, for they must have had lots of time to get away."

"Most extraordinary affair altogether," observed my brother.

"I stayed some time talking to Trefusis, and I am afraid it put my engagement here quite out of my head. But when I remembered, I hurried here as quickly as I could." He looked apologetically towards Mabel, who tried to smile, but succeeded badly.

"Plucky of you to come on here after such an experience," said Mr. Telby, who evidently regarded his son as worthy of all admiration.

"What was the second fellow like—the one who seemed a gentleman?" asked Gerald.

"Rather tall and slight. He spoke with a drawl. He had rather a pleasant manner, though."

"The description quite suits you, Fred," said Mrs. Fielders in her chaffing way. "I hope you haven't been doing any burgling."

Mabel gave a smothered cry, but Mrs. Fielders's remark and Mabel's exclamation passed unnoticed, for everyone's attention was fixed on the hero of the moment.

"It is a scandalous business," said my brother indignantly. "Our lives are not safe in our own houses. Why, bless me, Miss Telby!"

We all turned to Molly, who was found to be in tears.

"It is nothing," she said, wiping her eyes with her serviette. "I am very foolish, but, oh, if those dreadful men had hurt Gilbert!"

In my eagerness to console her I forgot the kindly protection of the flower-vase which I had been keeping between Gilbert Telby and myself. I leant forward to whisper consoling words in her ear. Looking up suddenly I discovered the young man's eyes fixed on me. A spoonful of soup was poised in mid-air. Then the spoon emptied its contents into his lap. His mouth opened, and he gave a kind of shocked exclamation.

"What is the matter, Gilbert?" cried his father. "The affair has been too much for you. You are faint?"

"It is nothing, nothing," murmured the young fellow. His eyes withdrew themselves from mine with an effort.

"Some brandy, please. Let my son have some brandy!" cried the father, quite distracted.

The servants flew to administer remedies.

"The Telby family is quite prostrated," murmured Mrs. Fielders in my ear. "I really don't think much of their nerves. Does Mabel intend to keep us here whilst that young man has his dinner? It will take a long time if he is to have restoratives administered between every course."

And then Mabel began to talk in a high-pitched voice, punctuated with little bursts of foolish laughter. Mrs. Fielders looked at her anxiously.

"What is the matter with everybody? Now Mabel is going to be hysterical. I really should not have thought it of her."

I looked at Mabel and frowned. She caught my glance, and checked herself in the middle of a sentence. Then her mother looked at her and half rose. I opened the door and the three ladies filed out.

We lit cigars, and I drank some liqueur brandy, while the young man, whose appetite had left him, made a pretence of eating some of the dishes the servants proffered. But he soon gave up the attempt and sat silent, drawing quaint designs with his fingers on the tablecloth, occasionally casting furtive glances in my direction. His father kept pestering him with questions, which he answered almost incoherently. At length the subject began to bore my brother, who broke in with a question about the Trewint election. This served to turn the conversation, and soon Mr. Telby was dilating in his deep voice on the political situation.

At length we joined the ladies. Mabel glanced apprehensively at her husband's face as he entered the room. I think she feared that young Telby had accused me of being *particeps criminis*, and that I had divulged the whole story. She cheered up a little when she found that peace still reigned serene.

It was not long before Mr. Telby, who must have noticed the pale face and constrained manner of his son, prepared to take his departure.

"Your brother will be down at Trewint early next week, will he not?" he asked Gerald.

"Yes, certainly," my brother responded.

"Of course, he will stay with us during the election."

"That is very kind of you. I am sure he will be delighted. Of course, Trewint Hall would be lonely——"

"Then we will take that as settled."

"Thank you, very much."

I was not consulted. Yet, as his chairman, it did seem to me he should show me more deference. However, it would be pleasant to be able to look at Molly.

When they had gone I turned to Mabel, who happened to be alone.

"I expect young Telby will give his father the tip to lock up the spoons while I am staying at their place."

She turned reproachful eyes on me.

"You make a jest of everything," she said. "I only hope it may not prove more than a joke. Oh Fred, how could you!"

VI.

AN ANGRY FATHER

AFTER my bath the next morning, I decided the best course was to call on Mr. Telby and find out what his attitude was towards me. If Gilbert had "blabbed," and I gathered Mr. Telby knew the worst, I would confide in him to a limited extent under the seal of secrecy. If he knew nothing, I would get hold of his son and find some way to make him keep his own counsel.

Mr. Telby was, as I knew, staying at the Hotel Cecil. I made my way there and sent up my name. After a considerable interval I was asked to step upstairs, and was finally ushered into Mr. Telby's presence. As soon as I saw his face I knew that Gilbert had told him everything. I suppose it is disconcerting to find your chairman is a polite burglar. At the side of the red-faced father was his pale-faced son, quivering all over with suppressed excitement.

"I have called," I said smoothly, to break the awkward silence, "to talk over our plan of campaign. There are so many things on which I had no opportunity of speaking to you last night."

"Quite so," boomed Mr. Telby. He looked uneasily at his son. "I am sure I should be delighted, but,"—he glanced at his watch,— "as a matter of fact——"

"The time is not convenient?" I interposed. "Some other time then. The matter is not pressing."

He hummed and hesitated, commencing disjointed sentences and then breaking off. I understood the predicament he was in. As an honest and respectable man he did not care to associate himself with a person of burglarious tendencies. On the other hand, the Trewint influence would be a potent factor at the coming election, and he was not altogether prepared to sacrifice it. He was facing the problem which has troubled good men from the beginning—how far one is justified in communing with the mammon of unrighteousness for the sake of ulterior good. I had it in my heart to pity him. At any rate, I would put an end to his suspense by introducing the subject. I turned to Gilbert.

"I hope you are none the worse for your experiences of yesterday?"

They both gasped at my boldness. The young man receded a step.

"You allude," replied his father, choking, "to the audacious robbery at which my son surprised the—the participators?"

"I nodded pleasantly.

"My son is none the worse—none the worse at all, thank you."

"Have you any news?"

"I am not sure." He straightened himself. "I am expecting every moment a call from my son's friend, Mr. Trefusis. He has been good enough to promise to call at my request, as I am anxious to obtain certain details from his own lips."

"Oh, indeed." I smiled rather forcedly. It was tiresome that Trefusis should be calling just at that time. But should I go, or should I stay? Their eyes were on me, and I felt they expected me to make a bolt for the door.

"I expect him every moment," repeated Mr. Telby. I think he wished to give me a chance to escape. Perhaps he wanted to avoid a scandal in his rooms. To have your prospective chairman arrested in your own apartments is an awkward commencement of a contested election.

"I shall be glad to see him," I replied with assumed heartiness. "He is an old acquaintance of mine. We were at Oxford together."

"You—you know him?" asked Mr. Telby in great surprise.

"Oh, yes; very well."

Mr. Telby's mouth opened and he looked at his son, who sat down rather suddenly on a plush-covered chair.

"Then, in that case—surely—I cannot understand——" He stopped dead.

"You are evidently perturbed about something?" I said. "I wonder if I can help you?"

He pointed his finger at his son. "The fact is—he——"

"I am quite sure!" burst in the young man. "And Trefusis will corroborate it."

"Corroborate what?" I asked.

"Silence, Gilbert," boomed his father. "Will you insult my friend—if I may call you so, Mr. Trewint?—in my rooms?"

"I am sure Gilbert doesn't want to insult me," I interposed.

"As sure as I sit here——" began Gilbert.

"Be quiet!" cried Mr. Telby.

"It's all very fine——" said the young man sullenly, but his father interrupted him hastily.

"If Mr. Trewint knows Mr. Trefusis, it is evident you have made a stupid mistake. You told me yourself that Trefusis had never seen the man before."

"I am certain I am not making a mistake," rejoined Gilbert.

Mr. Telby turned to me. "Pray forgive the silly lad," he said effusively. "He has been misled by some trifling likeness, and actually

avers—the very thought makes me laugh!—that you were—really, I cannot put his nonsense into words.”

The “silly lad” was exceedingly red in the face. He kicked viciously the leg of a chair.

“I wish,” he exclaimed, “that Trefusis were here.”

As if in response to his desire, the door opened and a servant entered to say that Mr. Trefusis was waiting below. Now it was my turn to feel rather uncomfortable. I buttoned my coat and drew a long breath.

“I am afraid,” I remarked, “I don’t wholly understand what is disturbing you, but as you have another visitor, perhaps I oughtn’t to detain you. If you will allow me, I will call later.”

“What did I say?” shouted Gilbert triumphantly; “I knew he would not face Trefusis.”

I bit my lip. “Really, Mr. Telby, your son has quaint manners. I have no objection to face Mr. Trefusis—a hundred Mr. Trefusises for that matter. Why cannot he be shown up?”

“Why, certainly,” said Mr. Telby, fussy and unhappy. “Why not, indeed? A very sensible suggestion, and one that does you great credit. Personally, I don’t regard seriously Gilbert’s ridiculous suspicions. The very thought is absurd. And if he has been making a mistake, I shall most certainly reduce his allowance.”

“Please remember,” I said with great affability, “that I am still in the dark, but I daresay a very satisfactory explanation will be forthcoming shortly. Won’t Mr. Trefusis be getting tired of waiting?”

Acting on the hint, Mr. Telby told the servant to show Trefusis in. I tried to appear unconcerned. Mr. Telby walked with quick, jerky steps between the door and the fireplace. Young Telby, sitting on a chair against the wall, watched the door. I sauntered to the window.

Trefusis came in with his quick, buoyant step, and advanced with outstretched hand towards Mr. Telby. He was shaking hands vigorously when I half turned towards him and our eyes met. He stopped dead, and his face changed slightly. I came slowly forward.

“Why, Trefusis,” I said, “this is an unexpected pleasure!”

“Yes, indeed.” His eyes were on mine, and he seemed on the alert. It would be wise to give him the cue; it was for him to take it or reject it.

“I don’t think,” I said, holding out my hand—not willingly, but it was necessary—“we have met for over a year.”

For a single moment he hesitated. Then he touched my hand.

“Quite that, I think,” he said.

I drew a breath of relief. There was to be no open scandal. The battle, if any, was to be fought on another field.

Mr. Telby turned to his son. "Now, Gilbert," he said, "you see what an imbecile you have been making of yourself!"

"What has Gilbert been up to?" asked Trefusis in his careless way. He was standing near Gilbert, and slipped his hand through the lad's arm.

Mr. Telby laughed loudly, but with little mirth. "He has been trying to convince me that Mr. Trewint was one of the two thieves that robbed you last night."

Trefusis's glance met mine squarely. He gave a low, amused laugh. "I am afraid Gilbert is a bit of a donkey," he said, and shook him gently by the arm. "Of course, the staircase is rather dark. Besides, I do think," he added judicially, "there is some resemblance, but my visitor was of a heavier make, and, if I am not mistaken, he had a slight mustache."

"No," said Gilbert emphatically, "I am sure he had not."

"Perhaps I am wrong," replied Trefusis indulgently, "but, in any case, Trewint isn't the man. Bless my soul, I've known Trewint for years."

"The suggestion was highly absurd," replied Mr. Telby. "And Gilbert owes Mr. Trewint a very humble apology."

"Oh, nonsense," I interposed hastily. "Trefusis says there was a resemblance, so Gilbert is not so much to blame, after all. I think we can fairly consider the matter at an end."

"Gilbert must express his regret," returned his father, eying him sternly.

"No, no," I exclaimed. I was sorry for the lad, who stood fidgeting on one leg, very red and confused.

"Gilbert!" His father regarded him with rising anger.

"Please, please——" I interjected.

Gilbert shifted from one leg to the other. "Of course," he began at length, "if I am making a mistake, I—I am sorry, but all the same, I can swear——"

His father exploded. "How dare you persist in your cock-and-bull story!" he cried furiously. "Leave the room at once, and do not let me see your face till you can tell me you have expressed your utmost contrition to a gentleman, a friend, of the highest standing, who is kindly putting himself about to assist me. How dare you, sir!" He spluttered with anger, and waved a clinched fist in his son's face.

"Pray, pray——" I implored. I was feeling most uncomfortable. I had embarked on a course of deceit, and poor young Gilbert was paying the penalty.

His father waved me aside. "Your intercession does you every credit," he said, "but this is a matter between my son and myself. I regret to see such pig-headed obstinacy in one from whom, from his

bringing-up, I am entitled to expect better things. I apologize for him, I apologize most humbly. And before long, I can promise you, he will apologize for himself." Then he turned to the unfortunate lad. "Did you not hear me bid you leave the room? Shall I have to put you out? By Heaven! if you were a few years younger, I would thrash you. As it is, get out of my sight!"

"I can only say what I believe," began Gilbert. "If I am wrong——"

"If you are wrong!" bellowed his father, who had worked himself into a very pretty passion. He rushed at the young man and began to hustle him towards the door. Gilbert seemed inclined to resent this cavalier treatment, and there was every prospect of an unseemly struggle between father and son, when Trefusis, who was never lacking in tact, intervened.

"Come with me, Gilbert," he said soothingly, "and don't be a duffer." He pulled him gently towards the door. Gilbert, with his head high in the air, suffered himself to be led away.

When the door closed Mr. Telby wiped his brow with his handkerchief. I stood in uncomfortable silence, half inclined to unbosom myself of the whole stupid story in order to put things right between father and son, but uneasily conscious that by so doing I should be sacrificing another's interest.

I took up my hat and stick. It was no use talking. His anger against his son was not so much because of an injury to me, but from fear of a loss to himself.

"Well, good-by, Mr. Telby," I said, rather curtly.

"Good-by, Mr. Trewint. I think I can promise that my son will call on you shortly."

"Oh, please don't. But, of course, I shall be delighted to see Gilbert if he cares to call."

VII.

HUMBLE PIE

THE bye-election at Trewint had been caused by the elevation to the bench of Mr. H. T. Renton, K.C. The Radical papers had been pleased to designate the appointment a "political job," simply because the new-made Judge was more renowned for unobtrusive services to his party than for eminence in the forensic arena. I knew Renton well, and a few days after my interview with Mr. Telby, seeing him dozing in an armchair at the club, I thought it a favorable opportunity of getting his views on the election his resignation had occasioned. One of the weekly papers had headed an article on his appointment with "Who is Mr. Renton?" With this in my hand I approached him.

"Excuse my troubling you," I said politely, "but would you mind telling me who you are?"

He took the paper I held towards him, scanned the article, and tossed it aside. Then he solemnly winked. "One of His Majesty's judges," he made answer.

"And about Telby?"

"He is a great man in his way. He owns the engineering works, and he takes the chair at literary societies, making assertions which frighten. He is a teetotaller and a Nonconformist, and the new Trewint has begotten a love for Dissenters. Then, he has the Trewint influence, of which I see you are to be the exponent."

"A feeble exponent," I said modestly.

"Possibly; I mean, not at all. Don't they know you well, and love you very much?"

"Hardly, I fear. I have only been at Trewint twice since I left Harrow."

"That may be so, but Trewint has grown into a sporting town, and they study county cricket. You are a hero in Trewint; made of tin, no doubt, but still a hero."

I blushed to hear I was famous. "So you think Telby is safe?"

"No, I don't think he is safe, but I think if he fights hard he will get returned. Personally, I can't bear Telby, who bores me to distraction. I am told he is a domestic tyrant, and his children live in terror of his frown. At the same time, if you meet him, he tires you with a list of their many virtues, especially of his son, of whom he thinks no end. The girls are pretty, and he is very rich. You might do worse than marry one of them. You won't find a handsomer girl than his eldest daughter."

"I know her," I replied laconically. "Very nice, but not clever."

"Who wants a clever wife?"

"I am afraid I am not a marrying man."

"We all say that till we meet the right girl. However, you are young yet."

I rose. "Thanks for your information about Trewint and the Telbys."

"My advice to you," he said, yawning, "is to keep on good terms with the Dissenting element. There is a young parson—by name Vicars—who takes a keen interest in politics, and is esteemed no end of a great man. Try and get on his right side, and it will help you a lot. He speaks well, but is terribly narrow-minded. I have been told he is in love with Telby's eldest daughter, but Telby doesn't think he is good enough. If you can get Vicars to back your man, you will find it an immense assistance. He was against me last time, as I know to my cost."

"Is this Mr. Vicars a young man?"

He nodded. "As I said before, very eloquent and very able, but terribly narrow."

"The chances are, I suppose, that he will be against us?"

"I don't know. Telby goes to his chapel, is a teetotaler, believes in all sorts of fads and folly. I should think he was a man after Vicars's own heart. But, of course, there was the trouble about the young lady."

"Was that anything serious?" I asked curiously.

Renton shrugged his shoulders. "I believe Vicars was attracted by the girl and the father spotted it. I think he stopped Vicars coming to the house. But I really don't know the relationship between them now. Telby still goes to the chapel."

"Is this Vicars an educated man?"

"He went to Oxford. You went there too, didn't you? I should think he might have been a contemporary of yours."

"Vicars, Vicars," I repeated meditatively. "Do you know his College? At any rate, I don't suppose he was quite the type of man I should know."

"He went in for athletics a good deal. Got his blue—football, I think."

"By Jove, I remember a football Vicars. Tall, dark, with a slight stoop. Awfully keen on anything he took up. Is that the man?"

"That's him to a T. Then you know him?"

I shook my head doubtfully. "Only very slightly. He was older than I, a couple of years, at the least. We had an encounter once at the Union. He was on the side of the angels, and I was on the other side. I remember he was angry, and retorted, rather bitterly, that I was a mere trifler, unworthy of serious consideration, and so forth; which was true enough, no doubt."

I saw Renton was getting bored.

"Well, you'll be able to renew the Homeric contests of your youth," he said. "Just pass me the *Spectator*, will you? I am sure it is too well-bred to confess it doesn't know who I am."

The time was drawing near when the campaign at Trewint would open in earnest. The official notification of Renton's appointment had appeared in the papers, and the respective party organizations at Trewint were girding themselves for the fray. The Liberal candidate was a local solicitor, not nearly so wealthy as Telby, nor, of course, an employer of labor, but a man whose antecedents were respectable and whose reputation for integrity was high.

I had not heard from Mr. Telby or his son since our unpleasant interview some days before. I hoped that, on consideration, Mr. Telby had given up his intention of compelling his son to apologize to me for a mistake which the poor fellow had never made. Unfortunately, I was wrong. The delay, it turned out, was due to Gilbert's recalcitrance. One day, on returning to my chambers, I found the young

man awaiting me. When I entered the room he was standing in the middle of the floor, with a flushed face, evidently ill at ease.

I greeted him cordially. "This is very kind!" I exclaimed. "Now, do sit down." And I bustled about with great energy in my endeavor to lessen the embarrassment which I shared equally with my visitor.

He put his hand in his breast-pocket and produced a sheet of notepaper. "The Governor," he said shamefacedly, "has written down what I have to say. If you don't mind, I'll just read it."

I sat with my head in my hands. If Mr. Telby had known how I hated him at that moment, it would have disturbed even his smug complacency.

Gilbert smoothed out the paper and began to read in a rapid whisper: "'I apologize to you, Mr. Trewint, very humbly, for having made such a ridiculous accusation about you. It was very foolish and wrong of me, and I ought to be punished severely. I sincerely beg your pardon and trust you will forgive me.' There!" He tore the paper savagely across, set his teeth, and glowered at me.

I drew a long breath. "Well, at any rate, it's over. You've done what your father required. I suppose now we can consider the matter at an end."

"There's one thing, also. My father says I am to ask you to write him a line saying that I have—have done what he wanted. He says that after my conduct he cannot trust me to—tell him the truth."

I sprang out of my chair. "My dear fellow, what a shame to treat you like this! It is I who owe you an apology, and I do beg you to forgive me for causing you this humiliation. I can't tell you how sorry I am, or how distressed I feel! If I can do anything in the whole world to prove this to you——"

"You can write that letter."

"Yes, yes; I will write anything you like, but it is too bad of your father to place us both in this miserable position."

"If you will write that letter now," he replied, with averted head, "I will take it away with me."

"I will write it, of course." Full of compunction, I sat down at my writing table and drew paper towards me. "What am I to say?"

"It will be enough if you say I called and apologized for my mistake."

"For your mistake?" I hesitated, and then threw down my pen. "I don't care to use that phrase."

He sighed wearily. "It really doesn't matter how it is put."

I thought a moment, and then I scribbled some words. "Will this do?" I asked.

"DEAR MR. TELBY: I have seen your son Gilbert, who has apologized fully. I am sorry he thought it necessary to do so. I trust the incident may now be considered finally closed."

He nodded. "Thank you, it will do very well."

I folded it and put it in an envelope, which I addressed. Then I turned towards him.

"Gilbert," I said rather impulsively, "now this stupid affair is at an end, will you shake hands?"

He had sunk back into his armchair with an expression of dejection on his face. He did not answer.

"You don't care to?" I said sadly. "Well, it can't be helped."

He roused himself suddenly, with a bitter laugh. "Why shouldn't I shake hands with you? You're a better man than I am, at any rate. I am a poor, miserable, weak-spirited wretch, humbly apologizing when I know I have made no mistake. If I haven't robbed anyone, I daresay it's because I have never been tempted. Oh, yes; I'll shake hands if you like."

I was disconcerted to find he considered me fit to shake hands with simply because he felt himself morally degraded. For some moments I regarded him in silence, feeling exactly as if someone had slapped my face.

"You still believe I am the man you met on the staircase the other night?"

He looked up quickly. "I suppose if I say so you will tell my father?"

"No, I won't. What do you take me for?"

"Do you know who opened the door for me when I called this afternoon?"

"I don't understand."

"It was Trefusis's servant,—late servant, I suppose I should say."

For the second time I experienced a moral shock.

"Why don't you go and tell your father that?" I asked at length.

"What's the good? I suppose Trefusis would deny point-blank that the fellow had ever been in his service. Besides, I haven't the least desire to get you into trouble. But I do object to being forced to apologize to a man I know is a thief."

I am afraid I swore under my breath. "Why did you apologize then?" I asked.

"I had to." The dull-red flush began to creep over his temples again.

"It has been hard lines on you," I returned meditatively. "But, Trefusis—isn't he a friend of yours?"

He nodded.

"Why then do you suppose he has also conspired to injure you?"

"I don't know. To spare your family, very likely."

"I don't think Trefusis is anxious to do that," I said, with a short laugh. "I say, young man, how old are you?"

"I'm nearly twenty."

"If you will forgive me saying so, you are not very intelligent for your age."

"I'm not in a position to resent any insults," he replied dejectedly.

"I don't want to insult you," I returned, "but I do want you to think. Assuming I was present on the night in question, don't you consider my presence and my actions can be explained otherwise than as you explain them—as a vulgar thief making off with silver spoons? You know about me and my family. Is it probable—is it even possible—that I would act from the motives you impute to me? Don't you think there may be more in the matter than lies on the surface? And don't you think you might give me the benefit of the doubt?"

He was silent for some minutes, and then he rose from his chair.

"I really don't care what motive took you to Trefusis's chambers. I only know you were the man I met coming out, and I have had to knuckle down and say you weren't. That's what hurts." He smiled a rather watery smile. "The fact is, I am a beastly coward and afraid of the Governor, and I am ashamed of myself for it. Good-by. I will shake hands if you like."

Our hands met in a not very cordial grasp.

"I know you have suffered a good deal through me," I said, "and I can only repeat I am very sorry."

"Oh, that's all right," he replied awkwardly. "And—and you haven't given me the letter."

I gave it to him, and he took it without a word. He moved towards the door.

"I wish to goodness I could tell your father the whole facts of the case, but there are others to be considered," I observed.

He stood for some moments with his hand on the door-knob.

"You said I wasn't very intelligent," he replied at length. "I think that's quite true. I admit it occurred to me that perhaps you were in need of money, and that was your reason for—doing as you did. But I see now that's absurd. I have already apologized to you because my father said I must, but, on my own account, I am sorry I called you a thief."

"Thank you." I was touched; and with a sudden impulse I added, "Look here, shall I go and tell your father that you made no mistake? I can't give him reasons, but I can tell him you were quite right."

"No, it wouldn't do any good."

"You are sure?"

"I am certain."

"I am not sure," I said thoughtfully, "that I oughtn't to go."

"I beg you not to do so," he said quickly. "Surely you understand that my father *wants* you to be innocent. It would be so awkward about the election if you were not."

He went out quickly, shutting the door with some violence.

VIII.

BROTHERLY SOLICITUDE

I RECEIVED a peremptory note from my brother, bidding me call on him before I left town for Trewint. Accordingly, I turned up at lunch-time on the day previous to my departure for the scene of the approaching conflict. I found Mabel alone.

"Why haven't you been to see me before?" she said reproachfully. "I have been living in a perfect fever of anxiety, and not a word from you. It is really not kind."

I glanced round the room. "Where's Gerald?"

"He's in his study, very busy. We've a minute or two to ourselves before lunch. Now tell me everything."

"About what?"

"Oh, you know well enough. For days I haven't dared to open a newspaper or look Gerald in the face. Oh Fred, how could you?"

"Could I—what?"

"Act in such a hare-brained fashion. Didn't I tell you on no account to use violence?"

"Just like you, Mabel," I replied resignedly. "I knew I should get blamed, whatever I did."

Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "I don't blame you, Fred. You acted too nobly for anything. I am not worth it." A delicate lace handkerchief was lifted to her eyes. "But, oh, it frightens me!"

"My dear Mabel," I replied, "the whole thing is over and forgotten by this time. Pray don't revive it."

"But Mr. Trefusis? How he must hate you! I am sure he is only biding his time."

"Let him!" I replied with heroism. "And there's the gong."

We went into the dining-room, and in a few minutes Gerald came tearing in with a sheaf of loose papers in his hand.

"Morning, Fred. I'm frightfully busy, as usual. Why haven't you been to see me about the election? Your usual laziness, I suppose. And here have I been working like a slave for you,"—he waved the papers in the air,—"*although I haven't a moment to spare.*"

"You're always so good," I said, unfolding my napkin. "And what is your latest kindness?"

"Gerald, dear," interposed his wife, "won't you put those papers away and attend to your lunch?"

He sat down, propping his bundle of manuscript against a sherry decanter and knocking over a wine-glass.

"I've been drafting out your speech for the first meeting. 'Ladies and Gentlemen——'"

"Oh, don't bother to read it aloud," I put in. "I'll glance over what you have written as soon as I have a moment to spare."

"By the way," he said, "you'll see a good deal of that Telby girl." He winked at his wife. "Fine girl, eh, Fred?"

"Oh, very nice," said I, breaking a walnut with my fingers.

"Her father will give her a good, round sum when she marries."

"How do you know that?" I asked, looking up.

"A little bird told me."

"I don't believe little birds," I replied, "and I don't care, anyhow."

"I know it on the best authority," he went on. "I don't know why I shouldn't tell you that Telby told me so himself."

"Oh, indeed!" I intercepted a warning glance passing from Mabel to her husband, and wondered where the conversation was tending.

"Six figures, Fred. You may take it for certain."

"I am really not interested."

Mabel intervened. "You might do worse, Fred. And—and it is time you settled down."

I glanced up. "Oh, that's the idea, is it? Six figures, did you say? Well, she's a handsome girl."

Mabel and Gerald exchanged smiles.

"But I'm afraid," I continued, "she'd worry me into my grave. She's a perfect idiot."

"Suit you splendidly," said my brother enthusiastically.

"I don't suppose Mr. Telby would hear of it."

"Oh, yes, he would," returned my brother incautiously.

"What, the matter's been mooted?"

Gerald hesitated, grew confused, and stammered out a half-denial, following it immediately with a half-admission.

I frowned thoughtfully. "Ought not love to enter into affairs of this kind?"

"Certainly," said Mabel with great decision.

"Well, I'm not in love with her."

"You've only seen her once."

"Oh, I see; it is contingent on our falling in love."

"Why, certainly," responded Mabel.

"A young man," remarked my brother, "has usually no difficulty on that score."

"Unless he already loves someone," suggested my sister-in-law. "Do you, Fred?"

"Certainly not," replied my brother for me, with extreme annoyance at the suggestion.

"Then I don't see," observed Mabel, "why it can't be arranged. It would be the making of you, Fred."

"I don't care to be wife-made," I retorted. "I would even prefer to be self-made."

"In the latter case," said Gerald, "you would be very badly made. But we needn't discuss the matter further. Everything depends on Fred, so I have little hope."

"The girl has to say a word or so," I hinted.

"Mr. Telby has brought his family up very well," replied Gerald.

"You mean," said I, "the unhappy girl will do what she is told?"

"She will realize her father knows best."

"You don't suppose," I rejoined with indignation, "that I will be a party to any compulsion?"

"I don't see," retorted Gerald drily, "how you can otherwise expect to get married."

"Then I'll remain single."

"Don't annoy him, dear," said Mabel to her husband. "He's only teasing you," she said to me. "Why, hundreds of girls would give their heads to marry Fred," she threw to her husband.

"In Miss Telby's case, it would not be a great gift," I observed.

"If she gives her heart," said Mabel gently, "won't that be enough?"

I shrugged my shoulders and helped myself to a cigar from my brother's cabinet. "I'll think about it."

IX.

MILLY

I LEFT for Trewint by the morning train, which, in the ordinary course, would have given me half an hour for lunch at Middleton Junction. However, on arriving there a porter came hurrying to tell me a train for Trewint was just starting.

"How's that?" I asked. "I thought I had half an hour?"

"It's the morning express," he explained. "Been delayed by a goods-train off the line."

It is not often that an accident accelerates a railway journey, but in the present case I was landed at Trewint an hour before I was due. There was hardly a soul in the brand-new red-brick station that had taken the place of the wooden shanty to which I was accustomed.

"Do you think I could get a trap at the 'Swan'?" I asked the porter, a pleasant-faced lad, with a shock of red hair.

He was willing to go and ask, and was half-way across the yard when I changed my mind and called him back.

"On the whole," I said, "I'd rather walk. Can you put these things"—I indicated the desolate heap—"in the booking-office till they are called for?"

He approved the suggestion, and laid hands with great willingness on my bag.

"By the way," I continued, "do you know Mr. Telby by sight?"

Of course he did. His manner gave me to understand I had asked a ridiculous question.

"Well, will you tell him that I caught an earlier train and that I am walking to Dewhurst?"

"Yes, sir. What name shall I say?"

"Oh, Trewint—Mr. Trewint."

He dropped the bag with a thud on the stones. "Not—not Freddy Trewint?"

I regarded him with surprise, and I suppose I should have reproved him for undue familiarity if his manners had not returned with a rush that colored his face the hue of his hair.

"I beg pardon, sir," he apologized, "but we always speak of you like that."

"It's very good of you to speak of me at all," I said; "but why?"

He explained; it seemed he followed with kindly interest, my exploits in the cricket-field. I forgave him at once. His manner indicated that he regarded me as a great man.

"Well, all right," I said. "You'll be sure to tell Mr. Telby I've gone on?"

"Miss Telby is in the town," he informed me eagerly. "I saw her go past on her bicycle. I think she's at the Mission Hall."

"Is that far?" It would be pleasant to see her again, especially as it had been arranged that I was to marry her some day.

"Oh, no, sir, just across the way. Shall I go and fetch her?"

It did not seem quite the thing to send a porter to fetch a young lady. "You might run across," said I, "and tell her that I have arrived before my time, and ask her if she knows where her father is, as I want to stop him troubling to come to meet me. Can you remember all that?"

He went off at a run, and I carried my luggage into the booking-office. I was detained a few minutes by the clerk insisting on collecting twopence for each package, as he called the items of my baggage. When I emerged again into the station-yard, it was to find a young lady and a gentleman in clerical attire and the porter, all engaged in propping a bicycle against the station wall.

"Here is Mr. Trewint, Miss," said the porter, kindly introducing me.

The young lady, who was certainly not the Miss Telby I knew, advanced quickly and offered her hand.

"I am sorry no one was here to meet you, Mr. Trewint. Papa will be so vexed."

I took her hand. "I am to blame. Or, perhaps, it is the driver who ran his engine off the line. In any case, it doesn't matter."

"Oh, but how are you to get to Dewhurst?" she asked.

"I propose to walk."

"It does seem inhospitable to make a guest walk five miles. I daresay we can get a trap at the 'Swan.'"

"Pray, don't bother. I shall like the walk."

She gave the most natural little laugh in the world. "We must manage to get you there somehow. So much depends on you, you know. And—and—Mr. Vicars, may I introduce Mr. Trewint?"

The gentleman so named came forward and shook me by the hand, not very cordially.

"I think we know each other," he observed.

"Oh, yes, of course," said I, not remembering him in the least.

"At Oxford."

"Ah, yes, yes. You're the football Vicars?"

"I used to play football in my younger days," he replied grimly, "when life was not, perhaps, regarded as a very serious thing."

I put him down at once for a prig. He was a tall, loosely made man, with a thin face and deep, melancholy eyes. I began to recall him.

"I remember," I said lightly, "I used to be rude to you at the Union."

He did not seem anxious to discuss the incidents of 'Varsity life, for he turned away. "If you like, Miss Millicent," he said, "I will call at the 'Swan' as I pass."

"Oh, please don't trouble," I said hastily. "I have really set my heart on walking."

"Shall I walk with you?" asked the girl. She could not have been much more than twenty, and she was extremely pretty, not beautiful like her sister, but bright, and altogether charming.

I tried not to show too much eagerness. "That would be delightful," I replied, "but it will tire you too much."

"Tire me!" She laughed at the idea.

"And you have a bicycle?"

"Oh, I can wheel it."

"I'll do that, of course," I answered, "but it's too bad to make you walk all that long distance. What a pity I didn't bring mine!" A thought struck me. "I suppose you couldn't lend me one, Mr. Vicars?"

"I do not cycle," he rejoined shortly.

"It would be rather nice if you could borrow a bicycle," remarked the girl. She looked round vaguely, and her glance fell on the porter, who was standing near, evidently feeling he was one of the party. "Why, Robert," she said, "I know you bicycle. Won't you lend yours to Mr. Trewint?"

"It will be very kind of you, Robert, if you will," I added.

Robert glowed with pleasure. "It ain't much of a one," he said warningly.

"It will do splendidly," I assured him. "Have you got it handy?"

"It's in the shed," he answered, and darted off to fetch it.

"It's just the thing," I said heartily, "though, perhaps, the saddle needs raising."

This was done with some difficulty, for the screws were stiff. When all was ready, we left the station-yard in fine style and spun along the main road.

"It's as good as horse-riding," I observed, as my steed bumped madly over a puddle in a vain endeavor to gain on the pretty figure that seemed to skim over the ground in front of me.

"You remind me of a luggage-train," she laughed. "What a terrible noise you are making!"

"I sha'n't require a bell, which is fortunate, as I haven't got one." Making a great effort, I managed to get abreast of her, and we rode along in silence.

At length she turned her head and regarded me with some curiosity.

"I have heard so much of you," she said. "And—and you're not a bit what I expected."

"But what have you heard about me? Nothing to my good, I expect?"

"No; nothing to your good," she answered gravely.

I was taken aback by her serious tone and the directness of her answer.

"May I ask for particulars?" I ventured.

She turned her head and smiled slightly. "No, I don't think you may." The next moment she changed her mind. "Perhaps I had better tell you that Molly and Gilbert are great chums, and, naturally, Molly takes Gilbert's part."

"I begin to understand," I remarked.

"Things have been very uncomfortable at home lately," she continued in a low voice. "Perhaps I oughtn't to say anything. It—it is so difficult to know when to speak and when to be silent. I should not have said a word if you had been different, but—but——"

"But—what?"

"Well, you seem good-natured," she went on hurriedly, "and I think perhaps you will understand; and—and—it may save awkwardness. Molly believes what Gilbert says, and—and she is angry that poor Gilbert should have been obliged to—to give in. She told father that if you came to Dewhurst she would refuse to speak to you."

My brain was in a whirl. "She won't speak to me, you say? I am in the position of a guest whose hostess declines to recognize his presence, but I have to try and pretend that everything is as pleasant as possible."

"So that father mayn't notice."

"I'll do what I can." The prospect was full of woe.

She laid a little hand on my arm. "It will be horrid for you; oh, so horrid!"

"I deserve it all, and a great deal more."

"I'll help you all I can," she whispered.

"Thank you very much. By the way, is Gilbert here?"

She shook her head. I felt relieved.

"So Miss Telby thinks I am a thief?" I observed after a pause.

She did not answer, but the color flew to her cheek. I ventured as near her as safety would permit.

"Do you also think I am a thief?"

The flush deepened, but still she did not speak.

"I see you do," I said sadly.

Her bicycle gave a sudden wobble. "Oh, please don't misunderstand me," she cried. "I only mean I don't think Gilbert made a mistake. I am certain there is a great deal more in the matter than we know. I have told Molly so over and over again."

"She is not prepared to give me the benefit of any doubt?"

"Well, no."

"It can't be helped."

"What a pity Gilbert met you."

"I agree very heartily."

She turned her head and smiled. "Why, you have admitted it was you!"

"So I have," I sighed. "The fact is, I make only a third-rate criminal."

"Why did you do it?" she asked curiously. "You weren't in want of—of money?"

"Oh, no, no," I cried. "It was for quite a different reason."

"But you can't tell?"

"It is impossible to tell."

She rode on thoughtfully. "I am only a woman," she said at length, "and awfully curious. But I won't ask you any more questions."

I thanked her. "I give you my word," I said earnestly, "that I haven't done anything really dishonorable. What I did, I had to do; and if it had to be done again, I expect I should do it again. But I am sorry for your brother."

"Let us agree not to talk about it any more. I believe what you have said."

We were approaching Dewhurst. In the distance a trap was approaching us, and as it drew near I saw Mr. Telby was driving it. His face expressed astonishment at finding me in his daughter's company. We stopped and dismounted, and explained the situation.

"I'll drive on to Trewint," he said, "and get your luggage, or if you are tired of that remarkable machine, I'll drive you back to Dewhurst."

"Not at all," I replied quickly, "I am enjoying my ride."

He waved his hand as he drove off. Milly and I remounted our bicycles.

"It is lucky," she observed reflectively, "that he won't be present when you meet Molly."

"I do trust," I said nervously, "there won't be a scene."

"Oh, no." But her tone expressed some doubt.

In a few minutes we reached the iron gate that separated Dewhurst from the main road, and we skimmed up the avenue.

"You're going to stand my friend?" I said apprehensively. There was something awe-inspiring in the solid stone house that rose before us. It reminded me of a prison. "Remember, I am only one."

She smiled encouragement. "I will protect you against Molly, and you must protect Molly against father. It's a bargain."

"If you are on my side," I replied, "I am ready to face anything."

"I am on your side," she answered. Our eyes happened to meet, and, for no reason, we averted them in confusion.

"I wonder where Molly is?" she said absently, peeling off her gloves. "I must go and find her."

"Is it necessary?" I asked.

"You had better see her before—before father gets back." She screwed her face up ruefully. "Isn't all this simply horrid?"

"It's disgusting," said I with emphasis.

The servant brought in tea and Milly poured me out a cup. "I am afraid you must be starving," she said. "Toast or tea-cake?"

I decided for tea-cake, helping myself largely, for I had had no lunch.

"What a blessing tea is!" she said almost cheerfully. "I feel better already. Have another cup?"

I had another cup. "This tea-cake is helping me a lot," I observed, with my mouth full. "Do try it."

So she tried it. I begged her to sit down.

She turned to me confidentially. "What a pity Molly can't be reasonable."

My eyes were on Milly's face, but a movement of the heavy curtains shrouding the window-recess at the far end of the hall attracted my attention. My gaze wandered away from Milly's pretty face and the rosebud mouth that bit at a tea-cake with little white teeth. I distinctly saw a hand arrange the hangings, with the evident intention of more carefully concealing the inmate from view.

"The fact of your having got Gilbert into trouble is quite enough to make her go on hating you for ever and ever."

"Oh Heavens!" I exclaimed, with an eye on the curtains, which were twitching uneasily, "surely it is not so bad as all that?"

"Molly never changes." Milly rose slowly. "I must go and find her. Will you wait here while I go and fetch her?"

I hesitated a moment. Should I tell Milly that I believed her sister was concealed in the window-recess? I decided, on the whole, it would be wiser to go through my first interview with my hostess without spectators; it might prove less trying to my pride. As soon as Milly had disappeared I tiptoed across the hall and drew back the curtains. Molly—for it was she, indeed—rose from her seat, her face the color of the sunset.

"I beg your pardon," I said, "I was just going to—look at the—landscape." I held back the curtains, one in each hand, and began to chatter volubly of summer beauties. Molly was enclosed within the recess and could only escape by ducking under my arm. She stood perfectly still and looked out of the window. I talked on, not daring to stop, but at length I had not a word left to say. So I was silent. She turned as if to go, but I did not drop my arms. She stopped, nonplussed.

"Mr. Trewint," she said at length, "will you kindly allow me to pass?"

I stood aside. "I beg your pardon," I murmured, and bowed. At any rate, she had spoken to me.

She passed out with great dignity and made straight for the staircase. I followed her.

"Miss Telby," I said, "may I say a single word to you?"

She moved more quickly for a couple of paces, and then stopped and turned coldly towards me.

"I—I saw your brother yesterday." She frowned. I hurried on. "I apologized to him most sincerely." She opened her lips as if to speak and then closed them. "I want to ask you to tell me what else I can do to show my sincere regret."

She hesitated. "You—you admit, then, that Gilbert did not make a mistake?"

I bowed my head. "Gilbert made no mistake."

"You own," she continued, with a distinct note of triumph in her voice, "that you were the thief?"

I had to think before answering. "I own," I replied at last, "that if there were any thief at all, I was the thief."

My answer puzzled her. "I am afraid I don't quite know what that means," she said. "In any case, have you told father?"

"No," I replied, "I haven't."

"Do you intend to do so?"

"If you wish it."

"Of course I wish it."

"Gilbert begged me not to."

My answer took her aback. She seemed greatly astonished. "Gilbert begged you not to?" she queried.

I made what I conceived to be an heroic gesture. "I have explained the matter to Gilbert, and he is satisfied. He wants nothing more to be said to your father, for he realizes that he has been partly in error. But what do I care what he wishes, if you desire something different? You have only to say the word, and I go to your father this very instant——"

"Oh, no," she cried; "certainly not, if Gilbert doesn't wish it."

"Say but the word," I went on in the same heroic vein, "and I will leave the house this very moment, and trouble you no more with my unwelcome presence. Possibly it will only reawaken your father's wrath against Gilbert, but if it be your wish——"

"Oh, no," she cried again, "I don't wish that."

"If I am a thief," I said, with exaggerated bitterness, "surely I am not worthy to remain here, even though it be to help your father in his approaching fight."

She did not know what to say or where to look. The tear-drops came to her eyes.

"I am not clever," she murmured very plaintively, "and I don't understand things. I daresay I have been wrong. In fact, I am sure I have, if Gilbert says so." She looked at me with her Madonna-like eyes. "Oh, I hope you won't go away. It will make father so angry."

"I will stay," I answered, "if I may stay as a friend of yours."

The tears rolled down her cheeks. "I am sure," she whispered, "I need a clever friend. Things are so very difficult, and I am never quite sure what to do."

She was very beautiful. "You may always rely on me to help you," I said gently.

"Thank you. And will you help Gilbert too? I am afraid there is something wrong——"

"In what way?" I asked quickly.

She shook her head. "I cannot tell," she replied, "but since Gilbert has been living in town he seems so different. I can't help noticing it. He doesn't seem happy."

"You are very fond of Gilbert?"

"Oh, yes, of course." Her face was maternal in its tenderness. "He is the youngest of us, you know. When my mother died, she left him in my charge. And so, of course——"

"I understand," I replied. I held out my hand.

"We are friends, aren't we?"

She smiled. "You and I and Gilbert."

"And Milly."

"Oh, yes, and Milly," she endorsed heartily.

I held her hand. "You forgive me all the pain I have caused you?"

"Oh, yes. And you will forgive me for being—stupid?"

I ventured to raise her hand to my lips. She was very beautiful, and the action was in the vein I had adopted. She blushed, and then started violently. I turned to discover Mr. Telby at the door with his eyes on us. At the same moment Milly came running down the stairs.

X.

MR. VICARS'S SERMON

It is useless to disguise the fact that the younger sister charmed me mightily, and if I had been allowed to dance attendance on her at my own sweet will, I should thoroughly have enjoyed my stay at Dewhurst. But it was not to be. Molly would sit in state in the drawing-room, her hands folded in her lap, her thoughts seemingly miles away, while Milly went busily to and fro on household duties. I would saunter out upon the terrace and smoke innumerable cigarettes, deciding moodily I was being terribly bored.

"Let us go and play billiards," I suggested one day.

Molly came down from the clouds. "But it is Sunday," she objected.

"So it is," I returned tamely. "I forgot."

"It will very soon be time to get ready for Chapel."

I brightened up. "I shall be quite glad to go to Chapel or anywhere," I said. "It will be something to do."

We had breakfasted at eight,—a ridiculous hour for the Sabbath,—and the interval between eight and eleven was a long one. I looked at my watch; it was hardly ten.

"What time do you start?" I asked.

"About half-past ten."

"Who preaches?"

"Mr. Vicars." Her face took a warmer color, and I imagined a happy little smile played about her lips.

"You are going, I suppose?" I asked.

"Oh, yes." She did not seem anxious to talk. Possibly she was wandering in a happy dreamland with Mr. Vicars.

"Do you like him?" I asked suddenly. She started and reddened, gazing at me with the eyes of a frightened fawn.

"As a preacher, I mean," I added in haste.

"Oh, yes, very much," she answered, in some confusion.

Then we were again silent. But I cherished no further doubt that she was in love with the gaunt parson.

When Mr. Telby came in he was dressed in a black frock-coat and trousers.

"Ah, Trewint," he observed, "I suppose you won't be coming to Chapel with us?"

"On the contrary," I returned, "I should like to do so."

"I shall be glad if you will. It will have a good effect." He eyed my tweed clothes.

"I will change at once."

"There's plenty of time. It's barely half an hour's drive. By the way, I suppose you know we're not Church folk."

"Oh, yes."

"I have sometimes thought," he said thoughtfully, "of going over to the Established Church. I may yet do it some day. The self-sufficiency of our Nonconformist ministers is intolerable. But, of course, until the election——"

"By the way, I know your minister. We were at Oxford together," I interposed rather abruptly.

He raised his eyebrows. "Indeed!" And then I saw he was thinking how he could turn that fact to his advantage. "Were you at all intimate?"

"No, I can't say we were."

"You would not be. You would not be." He scratched the topmost point of his head delicately with a forefinger. "Vicars," he continued, "is a curious, not to say a difficult, man. I confess he has disappointed me. When he came here I offered him every hospitality in my power. He came to my house frequently. And then——"

I glanced towards Molly. Her face was troubled. She rose, and with gentle dignity walked towards the door. Her father waited till it closed upon her.

"And then," he resumed, "he came to me and asked permission to pay his addresses to—to one of my daughters."

"Oh, indeed."

"His salary is exactly four hundred and fifty pounds—four hundred and fifty pounds!"

"Very handsome indeed," I rejoined, not knowing the line I was expected to take.

"I agree," replied Mr. Telby impressively. "Most handsome. If I may say so without vanity, it would hardly be so much but for my contributions to the funds of the Chapel."

"Really?"

"But surely, Mr. Trewint, my daughters may not unreasonably expect to marry men with larger incomes, or—some equivalent advantage?"

"No doubt."

"Vicars took my refusal badly, very badly. It may turn out to be an unfortunate incident in view of the election. At the moment, I am entirely ignorant what attitude he will assume."

At half-past ten punctually the carriage drove to the door and we took our places. Behind a pair of beautiful bays we bowled smoothly over the road. Milly sat at my side, and my eyes rested on Molly, who sat opposite. What more could man desire? A curious little incident occurred in the course of our drive. In drawing her handkerchief from her pocket, Milly drew out a little, three-cornered note, which fell at my feet. I picked it up mechanically, and could not help noticing it was addressed to Vicars. I should have returned it to Milly without comment if I had not noticed that her sister was unaccountably agitated. Almost instinctively I covered the note with my hand. Mr. Telby had been affably bowing to the inmates of a trap passing at the moment and had not witnessed the incident. As Milly made no movement to reclaim the note, I guessed she did not wish her father to see it, so I slipped it into my pocket, turning to her for approval. She gave a quick nod, and I observed that Molly's color came back.

The Chapel was a large stone building, with no pretensions to architectural beauty. A bill posted on each side of the entrance announced that the Rev. Mr. Vicars would preach on "The Duty of Electors." In the vestibule black-coated gentlemen were standing, who bowed gravely as we entered. We all returned the bow, and Mr. Telby also shook hands. Then he, leading the way, his daughters following, and I in the rear, walked slowly up the tile-paved aisle, almost to the elevated platform which took the place of the pulpit; then, turning to the right, we passed into a cushioned pew against the wall. Mr. Telby stood aside while Milly entered. I went in next, and Molly followed me. Mr. Telby took the corner seat, shutting the pew door with a decisive click.

After taking my seat, I fixed my eye-glass to take a look at my surroundings. I was disconcerted to find that the whole congregation were looking at me. I dropped my eye-glass and opened a hymn-book, not daring to encounter this concentrated gaze. When I had read a hymn through, it occurred to me that Milly might think I was priggish, so I

shut the book and turned to glean encouragement from her. She merely pushed various books of devotion towards me, which I meekly accepted.

When Mr. Vicars announced as his theme the subject stated on the bills at the chapel door, the congregation rustled gently and settled down to listen.

Having laid down general principles, he stated he would not apply them to the particular problem which was that day confronting his hearers. Each man must solve it for himself. I glanced at Mr. Telby and saw that his face betokened disappointment. During the preliminary remarks of the preacher his face had beamed with modest self-complacency. I saw that he felt assured he squared exactly with the definition of a "righteous candidate." It had evidently not occurred to him that the preacher might hold a different opinion. Evidently he expected to be crowned as "righteous" before the whole congregation, but he was shortly to suffer a severe disillusionment.

Mr. Vicars, having remarked that each man must make his own application of the general principles which he had laid down, immediately began to apply them in terms that were not even slightly ambiguous. "Suppose," he said, "one of the two candidates was a large employer of labor, and it was common knowledge that he treated his employés with harshness, sending helpless women and children to the workhouse and unhappy men to prison, would that be righteous? Certainly not. Would they be justified in voting for such a man? By no means."

The eyes of the whole congregation were now riveted on Mr. Telby, whose face was aflame. The allusion was obvious, though hardly a fair one. A few months previously there had been a lock-out at Mr. Telby's works. The difficulty was in reference to the employment of non-unionists, whose cause Mr. Telby had supported with success. There had been some cases of intimidation, and, under a recent Act, Mr. Telby had prosecuted, with the result that one or two workmen had been sent to prison. No doubt too there had been instances of privation.

The charge of oppression might have passed muster on a political platform, for no one expects absolute fairness in the rough-and-tumble of a Parliamentary contest, but to use the pulpit for a charge of this nature, to which plainly there was another side, while the unhappy victim sat tongue-tied below, was surely an outrage. Mr. Vicars, however, had worked himself into a passion, and, discarding all notes, was preaching extemporaneously, carried away by his own eloquence. It was to be my turn next.

"Suppose," he went on, "one of the two candidates, knowing that there was a family in the neighborhood whose name, rightly or wrongly, was held in high honor, having failed to get the assistance of the repu-

table head of that family, and desirous of influencing unthinking people, was to obtain the services of another member of the same family, well knowing him to be a foolish, vain, immoral trifler, who saw not nor cared for the seriousness of life, who lived for himself alone, who laughed at the earnest and mocked at the holy, would that be the act of a righteous man? Should a candidate who was content to use such a tool receive the suffrages of a sincere and honest electorate?"

I listened to this tirade with intense astonishment. His criticisms certainly did not square with my conceptions of my own conduct or character. It was a new view, and, naturally, interesting. I stole a glance at Milly; she was staring at the desk in front of her, her lips pressed together, and her brow furrowed with a frown.

At that moment Mr. Telby created a diversion by diving for his hat.

"I am going out," he said in an audible whisper. "I refuse to listen to any more rant. The man is mad. You must all come with me."

So saying, he rose, opened the door of the pew, and, bristling with indignation and breathing heavily, passed down the aisle. The preacher continued his harangue without pausing.

I made no move to follow Mr. Telby, deciding that even if the provocation were double, I would prefer to bear it rather than walk down that long aisle. The two girls also sat still. Molly looked white and agitated, and watched Vicars with a perplexed expression, as if she hardly comprehended the situation. No sooner had the green baize doors of the Chapel closed on Mr. Telby than Mr. Vicars seemed to lose the thread of his discourse; he stammered, grew slightly incoherent, and then, with an obvious effort, concluded his sermon without further personal allusions. I think most people breathed a sigh of relief when he gave out the closing hymn.

While the congregation labored through it Mr. Vicars sat with his hands covering his face. When the hymn was ended, he uttered the Benediction, and immediately left the pulpit.

As I collected my hat, stick, and gloves, I ventured to glance at Milly. She met my look without speaking.

"I expect father is waiting for us outside," said Molly. "Oughtn't we to hurry out?"

"No, no; let the crowd clear away first," I returned hastily. I was anxious to avoid discussing the incident with strangers.

Milly still frowned thoughtfully. The congregation filed out slowly, casting curious glances in our direction. For my part, I took some pains to appear cheerful and unconcerned.

Just as we were rising to leave the Chapel attendant approached me.

"Mr. Vicars," he said, with an air of some mystery, "will be greatly obliged if you will step into the vestry for a minute."

I hesitated, and turned, naturally enough, to Milly.

"Shall I go?" I asked her. "What do you think?"

She did not answer for a moment. "Please go," she replied at length. "He may wish to—to explain."

So I followed the man into a small inner room, in which I found Mr. Vicars sitting. He was pale and seemed weary, and I noticed his hands trembled.

He half rose. "I shall not detain you more than a minute, Mr. Tre-wint," he began. "I am indebted to you for your courtesy in coming here at my request."

"On the contrary," I said, "I am glad to have an opportunity of congratulating you on your admirable sermon."

He was silent. "I sent for you," he resumed at length, "because I realize I have been untrue to a great trust. I made an attack on you this morning from motives which were not pure. My personal feelings overcame me. I was angry, jealous, sick at heart, and I allowed myself to be carried away. When I entered the pulpit I had no intention of attacking you. But the words came, and I did not stop to think. As soon as they were uttered I knew they were prompted by motives which were unworthy."

I softened at once. "Of course, Mr. Vicars," I said, "we are all liable to be carried off our feet by our feelings. And some people do take politics so very seriously. But please say nothing more. I am quite willing to accept your frank explanation."

He made no immediate reply, but stared gloomily in front of him. So I gave him a friendly nod, and was preparing to leave the room, when he stopped me.

"Pray understand," he said stiffly, "that I do not withdraw a single word. Everything I have said it was my duty to say."

"Bless my soul," I exclaimed, "I thought you had just apologized!"

"I hardly expect you to understand me," he returned. "But all I have said to-day I was justified in saying; nay, more, bound to say. The more I consider it, the more I feel that I was performing a duty. But," he raised his eyes to the ceiling, "may Heaven forgive me, I spoke not because it was my duty to speak, but because I was swayed by personal enmity."

"This is quite enigmatical," I observed.

"I can well understand," he replied, "that anything that does not float on the surface of a man's soul is an enigma to you."

I ignored his observation, possibly because I had no answer ready. "If I remember rightly," I said, "you stated I was immoral; the other epithets may pass. Do you usually hurl such accusations from the pulpit at political opponents of whose character and private life you must of necessity be absolutely ignorant?"

"I am not ignorant of your private life nor of your character," he answered. "I could not know them more completely if they were written out on paper."

"Have you proof?"

"Yes, I have proof."

"Produce it."

"If necessary, I will produce it, but not now."

"This is hardly satisfactory," I said. "You sent for me to tell me you believe every word you uttered, and in the same breath that your motives were not pure."

"That is so."

"What were your motives? I have hardly the pleasure of your acquaintance. Why do you feel enmity towards me?"

He flushed. "If you ask me," he answered slowly, "I must tell you. We are competitors for the hand of the same lady,—I without hope, you with every prospect of success."

I looked at him with sudden enlightenment. "I think you go too far in saying I am a competitor for any lady's hand," I returned. "And, in any case, how do you know?"

"I have it from Mr. Telby himself," he replied.

I regarded him perplexedly. It was rather an awkward position. It was more than probable Mr. Telby had made some foolish assertion of the kind. "I really don't think we can discuss the matter longer with advantage," I responded at last. "As I understand it, you persist in the charges you made against me this morning. You have also relieved your conscience by confessing you made them from unworthy motives. By a lucky coincidence it appears that the promptings of malice and of duty alike required you to make them. This must be a matter of great satisfaction to you." My hand was on the door-knob, when I remembered the note I had picked up. "By the way, I have a letter for you. Here it is."

I left the room and joined the two girls. We found that Mr. Telby had obtained a trap from the "Swan" and had driven home. I was silent as to what had passed during my interview with Vicars.

XI.

THE PRIG AND THE WORLDLING

"WHAT are you young people going to do this afternoon?" asked Mr. Telby, turning to his daughters. "Of course, Milly, you will not go to the Sunday-school after what has happened to-day."

"Very well, father," replied his younger daughter with meekness.

Mr. Telby rose from his chair. "I think, Molly, you might show Mr. Trewint the ruins."

There was a distressing silence for a moment. "I—I have a headache, father," said Molly.

Her father frowned ominously. Milly intervened quickly. "If Mr. Trewint will accept me as a substitute——"

"I shall be delighted," I replied with heartiness.

Mr. Telby did not seem satisfied, but he could say nothing, and retired to his study, while Milly and I prepared for our walk.

We strolled along silently. I was the first to speak.

"I have been wondering what you think about that unfortunate affair this morning. I can't make out with whom your sympathies are—with Mr. Vicars or with me."

"I don't think it matters much with whom I sympathize," she replied.

"Ah, I am not sure of that."

"I greatly esteem Mr. Vicars."

"To the extent of acquiescing in all he says or does?"

"No, certainly not." She spoke with emphasis.

"Tell me," I said, "what you really think of Mr. Vicars?"

She looked at me with directness. "Why should I do that? Mr. Vicars is a friend of some years' standing. You——"

"Of days only, but still, a friend."

She did not speak for some moments. "I can't understand," she returned thoughtfully, "why Mr. Vicars spoke of you as he did. About father he only repeated what some of the papers said at the time, but I don't think he ought to have brought it into his sermon."

"People are always doing wrong and stupid things from a mistaken sense of duty," I suggested.

"Was that how he explained it to you in the vestry?"

"He did not allude to his remarks about your father. He told me that he was certain every word he had said of me was true, and that it was his duty to say it, but that it was also his duty to confess that he had spoken from improper motives, from a feeling of personal enmity."

"It seems very subtle." And then, to my surprise, she gave a little laugh. "Oh, yes; it is so like poor, dear Mr. Vicars. He is always analyzing and dissecting his motives until sometimes he doesn't know whether he is a serpent or a dove."

"I don't think he has a very robust mind," I hinted.

"He is very conscientious and earnest and devout," said Milly. "But, at the same time, he certainly does things which are not—well, not quite honorable."

"In what way?"

"Well, you know he is in love with Molly. I'm their go-between—I and Bob, the porter."

I turned and looked at her with astonishment. Milly flushed, and, averting her eyes, continued more rapidly:

"That letter this morning was from Molly. I always take a letter from Molly every Sunday, because I usually have to see Mr. Vicars about the Chapel work, or something. On Wednesday, when Robert comes over to see Mary, the housemaid, he brings a reply, which he slips into the tool-bag of my bicycle."

I could not keep my countenance. "This is really very wrong," I said reprovingly.

"I know it is; and, of course, I am as bad as he is. But what I can't understand is that so good a man as Mr. Vicars should stoop to such deception. I have told you all this because I know you will not tell father. But if you were in Mr. Vicars's place and he were in yours, I should not tell you. Why is that?"

"I am sure I don't know."

"Because I should be afraid that you would tell father. This is terribly confused. But what I mean is that Mr. Vicars, though very good and religious, hasn't got that sense of honor which a gentleman is supposed to have."

"A man's sense of honor," I explained, "is only another name for the force of public opinion prevailing in the circle to which he belongs. That is why Mr. Vicars probably thinks many things I do disgraceful, while possibly he does without a qualm other things that I could never bring myself to do."

Milly thought for a moment. "Was he justified in using the words he did about you?"

"I am not sure that he was justified, but I daresay there is some truth in what he says."

"Then," said she promptly, "you are dissipated?"

That was more than I was prepared to admit to Miss Milly. "The word may mean something wicked, or it may only mean something foolish. I plead guilty only to the lesser count," I answered cautiously.

Milly sighed. "I wish you didn't waste your life. It seems wrong."

We walked along in silence for a little while. "I have confessed a few of my defects," I said; "now, oughtn't you to tell me some of yours?"

She roused herself. "Well, I don't mind. Gilbert knows one, and I suspect Molly does too, only I don't suppose she puts it in words."

"Well," I asked, "what is it?"

She blushed deeply. "I—I am rather a—prig."

I laughed so loudly that the birds fluttered in the branches of a neighboring tree in protest.

"Are you sure?" I asked. "And however did you find it out?"

"Gilbert told me first," she said, with downcast eyes. "He had

got into debt, and he asked me to lend him some money. Instead of doing so, I lectured him and advised him to tell father everything. That was priggish, wasn't it?"

"It was, rather," I admitted.

"So he told me I was a prig, and proved it by ever so many other instances, that I couldn't help recognizing that it was true."

"Well," I said, "a fault confessed——"

"Oh, I know, I know," she cried hastily. "But the worst of it is, from fear of being thought priggish I do lots of things I oughtn't. I send Gilbert part of the housekeeping money, which is really almost stealing from father; and then I oughtn't to act as a go-between for Molly and Mr. Vicars." She sighed heavily. "You have no idea how difficult things are."

"Never mind," I said consolingly. "Let's hope everything will come right by and by. And if you agree not to think me the very worst kind of worldling, I'll agree not to think you the very worst kind of prig. Is that a bargain?"

"Very well," she agreed. "Only you mustn't think I approve of your wasting your life. Is that a priggish remark?" she cried in sudden alarm.

"Oh, no," I said.

"I am afraid it is," she replied mournfully. "However, as it is getting near tea-time, the prig and the worldling had better be getting home."

"Will the prig take the worldling's arm?" I asked.

She hesitated. "Will it be priggish of the prig to refuse?"

"Oh, very," I said.

"Well, as there is no one about, the prig will not be priggish on this occasion."

XII.

TREFUSIS AGAIN

I DROVE over to Trewint the next day to attend a committee-meeting at the Conservative Club. When we arrived we found the rest of the committee already assembled—twenty-two in all, of whom about two-thirds belonged to the tradesman and farmer class, while the other third consisted of professional men, with a sprinkling of representatives of county families.

When the meeting was at an end Mr. Telby escorted the county notabilities to the door with too profuse courtesy. The professional gentlemen took themselves off at the same time, but the others, whose interest in the election seemed keener, remained talking and arguing in groups. Mr. Telby, returning from seeing our only baronet to his carriage, seized me by the arm, and, with a curt nod in the direction of the lingering members of the committee, propelled me towards the door.

"Let's go home," he said. "There's nothing else we need bother about to-day."

It seemed so rude to break away in this abrupt fashion from men who, whatever their social standing, were working in our interest, that I disengaged myself from his grasp and again shook hands all round. Mr. Telby awaited me impatiently. The door had hardly closed on us when he turned to me.

"It's a waste of time being polite to these chaps," he said. "I own their shops."

Just as we were leaving the building he stumbled against a man passing.

"Confound you, sir!" he exclaimed. The man turned. It was Trefusis.

Mr. Telby held out his hand. "Didn't know it was you," he said. "And here's a friend of yours." He indicated me.

Trefusis's eye met mine, and he smiled blithely.

"Funny to meet in this dismal little hole, isn't it?" he observed genially.

"I suppose you've come to canvass on my behalf," said Mr. Telby jocosely.

"Hardly. In fact——"

"Well, you'll dine with us this evening? Only Trewint and the two girls."

"It's very good of you." He hesitated, and I wondered whether he would have the effrontery to accept the invitation.

"A quarter to eight," called out Mr. Telby as he climbed into his carriage. "By the way, where are you staying?"

"Oh, I am staying with an old college friend, a parson. In fact, I've promised to help him at the election."

Mr. Telby's face changed suddenly. "Not—not that blackguard——"

Trefusis's eye travelled to mine with ill-concealed amusement.

"Oh, no, not a blackguard, a most estimable man. His name is Vicars."

"Pshaw!" cried Mr. Telby with disgust. "I can't understand how any self-respecting man can associate with a—a——" His feelings were too deep for words. "And I remember we are not dining at home this evening. James, drive on."

During the drive he kept up a running tirade of abuse against Vicars. But I hardly heeded him. Here was a curiously unexpected development. Trefusis had come down to Trewint to assist Vicars! Why? And could Trefusis do our side any harm? It seemed improbable, except in so far as he could discredit me. Could he discredit me? I remembered Vicars's words in the pulpit and in the vestry the day before.

Were his vague allegations of profligacy prompted by Trefusis? Perhaps this was his revenge. If so, what a very dirty business! I cast my eye over my past with a sudden nervousness. I could find nothing very dreadful there—nothing which the average man would not find.

At Dewhurst I found a letter awaiting me from my sister-in-law. Here is an extract:

“Good news travels fast. I hear you are making very satisfactory progress with what, to my mind, is so much more important than that stupid election—the cultivation of the gentle Molly. Persevere, my dearest Fred. I would *love* to see you settled. And Gerald is ever so keen it should happen. Do you know, he was told by a friend, who had it from a man who is intimately acquainted with Mr. Telby’s affairs, that he is worth——”

I put the letter in the fire. Bother Molly! But I dressed quickly, and was in the drawing-room before the dressing-bell rang, on the chance that her younger sister might just possibly be early too; which, as it happened, she was.

XIII.

FIRST BLOOD

WHEN I came down to breakfast the next morning the sudden silence as I entered the room betokened that I was the subject of conversation. Around Mr. Telby’s chair there was a litter of newspapers. A sheet was propped up in front of him, and over it his red, angry face glowered like the sun through a fog.

“Good-morning,” I said. “Any news?”

He struggled for words. “He’s gone too far this time,” he managed to say at length.

I indicated to the servant my preference for bacon and kidneys. “Who has?” I asked.

“That—that——” As he did not complete his sentence I knew he wished to refer to Vicars.

“What has he been up to?” Milly poured me out some tea, and Molly passed the cup. I felt aggrieved and in no way interested in Mr. Telby’s complaints, for Milly had not articulately wished me “good-morning.” “We’ll go and call on Jenkins,” said Mr. Telby. “He’ll know how to put a stopper on this fellow.”

“Who is Jenkins?”

“My solicitor. A criminal prosecution ought to put an end to these slanders.”

“Has Vicars been at it again?” I asked rather indifferently.

“At it again!” echoed Mr. Telby. “Just you read the report of his speech last night in the *Central Chronicle*. We’ll go for the editor

too. We'll put the whole confounded crew in gaol! We'll show that we're not to be trifled with!"

"What has he said?" I asked with awakening curiosity.

"Said? He says you are a confirmed drunkard!"

The kidney on my fork stopped on its way to my mouth. I looked at Mr. Telby and then at Milly.

"What a funny thing to say!" I observed at length.

"Mr. Vicars didn't quite say that, father," interposed Milly; "he only said that once or twice Mr. Trewint was——"

"Read the infernal thing for yourself," roared Mr. Telby, pushing the newspaper towards me.

I took the paper, and half-way down a column headed "Liberal Meeting at Trewint," I read: "The Rev. Mr. Vicars, who was received with cheers, said that he felt their present position to be one of heavy responsibility. They were concerned in an election, and, as citizens, it was incumbent on them not only to return a worthy representative, but to see that a high standard of electoral purity was maintained. The cynical fashion in which the Tories were carrying on the campaign must meet with the reprobation of all honest men. What did they see? Mr. Telby alleged himself to be a temperance reformer. He was the president of the Trewint Temperance League, and had at the initial meeting placed his name in the pledge-book. Those of them present would recall his speech on that occasion. And whom had he chosen for his chief supporter? A man with an honored name (cheers). They cheered, but what was an honored name alienated from an honorable life? (Loud cheers.) Was this chief supporter of Mr. Telby a temperance reformer? They knew he was not. He was revealing no secret when he stated that the individual in question had on more than one occasion been fined for drunkenness—for being drunk in public places. This was the man Mr. Telby chose as his chief supporter. How dared he insult their wives and daughters by bringing such a man into their midst? He trusted they would show by their votes that they resented such conduct."

I laid down the paper and looked at Milly. Her eyes were turned away, but they came round to mine almost reluctantly, and I noticed with a thrill that they were full of tears.

"Well?" said Mr. Telby.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Well?"

"What do you propose to do?"

"I don't propose to do anything," I answered, continuing my breakfast.

"You don't propose to do anything!" repeated Mr. Telby. "Oh, yes, you do! You're going to prosecute him—to make a public example of him."

I shook my head.

"Why not?"

I did not answer for a moment. "On the whole," said I, "the best course is to let the matter slide."

He glared at me. "Not even deny it?"

"No." I spoke perhaps more decidedly than usual, for Mr. Telby stopped short, poised, as it were, in mid air.

"To take no notice!" he ejaculated. "Good Heaven! what will people think?"

"Oh, well," I said, "I don't mean that I sha'n't perhaps allude to it at one of our meetings, but I only propose to rely on words."

"What an opportunity to throw away!" he groaned. "You will give the impression it is true."

"It can't be helped."

"I could almost believe you have been fined for drunkenness," he cried with sudden exasperation.

"So I have."

When a footman, trained to immobility, gives a short, quick gasp and drops a plate, you may be sure his feelings are powerfully moved. And if a menial, who is only remotely interested, betrays strong emotion, what must be the sensations of his master, who is directly concerned? Mr. Telby was silent,—suddenly, blankly silent,—the quiescence of complete prostration.

I looked towards Milly. She gazed at me with an expression of absolute terror. Molly and I continued our breakfast.

It was some minutes before Mr. Telby spoke. "You have been fined for drunkenness!" he whispered.

"At least twice," I replied cheerfully.

"Twice?" he moaned. "Twice?"

"Twenty shillings on each occasion. And very moderate, considering."

"You do not appreciate the gravity of the situation," he said, choking. "It will lose me the whole of the temperance vote. I consider," he burst forth with sudden fury, "that you should have warned me."

"Warned you of my unhappy propensity?" I asked politely.

"Warned me you had publicly disgraced yourself," he fumed. He rose and strode about the room. "What am I to do?" he cried. "See in what a position you have placed me!"

"But you didn't know."

"I know now."

"Then throw me over. Send me back to London by the next train. I will go."

"But then I shall lose the Trewint vote," he wailed; and if he had

not been a short, stout man, naturally sparing of gesture, I think he would have wrung his hands. His eyes travelled to Molly, and then they rested on me. "No," he said decisively, "we must make the best of it. We must explain it away. Possibly"—hope beamed in his eye—"you were then very young?"

"Well, yes," I acknowledged, "I was young."

"And you repent; you deeply repent?"

"Oh, hang it, no! It was tremendous fun."

He groaned. I could see he was suffering acutely. Then another thought flashed through his brain. "Young men of spirit, old heads not for young shoulders, not responsible, years of discretion," I heard him mutter. He felt in his waistcoat pocket for a pencil, and, not finding one, searched behind the clock, and, balked again, hastened out of the room with the evident intention of making a note.

The breakfast-room opened into the garden and the fragrance of summer filled the air. Milly had risen from the table.

"Let us go into the garden," I suggested.

She shook her head.

"Oh, please, come."

Molly was still at breakfast. She had a hearty appetite.

"You might go and pick the flowers," she said to her sister.

"I—must see the cook," said Milly hurriedly.

"P," I observed. Milly gave me a startled look.

"You'd better do the flowers first," said Molly, taking a piece of toast.

"Oh, no, I must——"

"R," I remarked.

Again she started. She took up a bundle of keys and jangled it.

"I really must attend to my household duties," she said firmly.

"I," I continued.

"Oh, oh, I'll come." She gave a little run and was out in the garden, the sunlight on her hair. I followed more leisurely. As I approached her she hurried on across the lawn to the flower-beds.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" I asked from behind,—"no reproaches? no nothing?"

She turned suddenly, and for the second time that morning I saw tears flood her eyes.

"You make light of everything," she said. "But I—I cannot make light of everything."

"You are angry with me."

"I am—disappointed."

"Have I not always disappointed you?" I asked dejectedly.

She was silent for a time, and then she looked up. "You—you never had a mother," she said softly, and there was maternal solicitude in her voice.

"You are trying to find an excuse for me," I returned. "What a kind little heart you have. But it is no good! I did have a mother; it was quite necessary."

She wheeled away angrily. "You—you make it very hard for me to talk seriously."

"And so I do," I assented, ashamed.

She began to snip off flowers with a pair of scissors that hung at her waist. I produced a cigarette.

"Drunkenness," said I, "is not a romantic failing."

She flashed an indignant glance at me over her shoulder.

"Once," I continued, "you thought me a burglar, and you were quite right. I have many little failings. Now you think me a drunkard. And why? Because twice, in a long and checkered career, I have taken more than was good for me,—only twice!"

"In public places! Oh, the shame of it!"

"I did not drink in public places, though I admit I exhibited myself afterwards—I have no real modesty—in my college quadrangle. It was after a bump supper. We were all rather—well, merry. And we made a lovely bonfire."

"Oh, all this happened at college?" she exclaimed, seemingly relieved.

"That makes no difference," I retorted severely. "Pray do not try and comfort me by false distinctions. The British workingman, reeling home to batter his wife; the undergraduate, celebrating his college's victory;—both are equally to blame, for both are equally intoxicated."

"I suppose you were fined by a don or a proctor—or whatever you call him?"

"And that," I rejoined, "is as disgraceful in principle as if the fine were inflicted by a stipendiary magistrate."

"There seems to be a difference," she observed, "and, in any case, you were only a boy."

Her arms were full of flowers. She smiled over them.

"I cannot see the distinction," I replied.

"It was very wrong of you to mislead papa," said she. She moved towards the house, but stopped for a moment to look back. "I am glad you didn't spell the whole word."

XIV.

OUR FIRST MEETING

TREWINT was becoming infected with the excitement of the approaching contest. The walls and windows were covered with colored posters, and the more enthusiastic of the populace had already adorned themselves with rosettes. Our first meeting was certainly enthusiastic.

When the Dewhurst party, consisting of Mr. Telby, the two girls, and myself, ascended the platform we were cheered again and again. Then someone called for "groans for Vicars," and the howling was indescribable.

The meeting had not progressed far before it became apparent that the audience regarded the vulgar episode in which Mr. Vicars and I figured as the important feature of the election. When I rose someone in the gallery lowered a sheet with some of my scores in county cricket inscribed thereon, and the cheering again became tremendous. It became obvious that the hall was full of what might be called the Trewint "sporting" element,—young men from shops and factories, not one in six probably possessing a vote,—all of whom seemed to regard me as a kind of local hero. They were a rowdy crew, and I admit that at first I was by way of feeling ashamed. But their vociferous cheers were like incense to Mr. Telby. He sat and beamed and bowed, the picture of rubicund content. In a little time I too was swayed by that curious influence which binds an assembly together, and I began to regard myself as no small figure in no small movement.

I had intended, as I had hinted to Mr. Telby, to try and get a "little of my own" back at this meeting. I had prepared many bitter and sarcastic things to say about Mr. Vicars, most of which, on mature reflection, I had rejected. But in the excitement of the moment I let myself go. Certainly my speech was a success. It was cheered to the echo. Every "score" I made received its meed of applause. If it is the chief aim of a speaker to obtain the approbation of his audience, then I achieved my object. If, on the other hand, it is his duty to say nothing of which he will be ashamed in calmer moments, then, emphatically, I failed. It will serve no end to set down my quips and cranks at Mr. Vicars's expense. They were cheap enough, Heaven knows, or they would not have won the applause of the rabble I was addressing.

As I neared a triumphant close I happened to turn and catch a glimpse of Molly's face. Her eyes were fixed on me, and there was a piteous, hunted look in them which gave me pause. In that brief glance I noticed that Milly held her sister's hand and was gently smoothing it between her own, and that on her face there was something like scorn. I hesitated for a moment, and then, pulling myself together, finished my speech in an entirely different key. My final words were almost a rhapsody on Mr. Vicars's virtues. I reminded my audience, who did not applaud, of the work he had done amongst them, how he had fought against the small-pox epidemic a few years before, and how his life had been devoted to the succor of the poor and needy. "I think," I concluded, "that he has treated me badly, and I too have spared no hard

words in speaking of him. But I expect that he and I both realize that much which is said at election times is forgotten as soon as the poll is declared. I know that not one in this hall has really forgotten his sterling worth, and I hope when the contest is at an end, whatever may be the result, I shall be privileged to meet as a friend a man whom I esteem."

I sat down amid considerable, though not tumultuous, applause. My last words had proved somewhat of a cold-water douche to the enthusiastic exuberance of the meeting. But I did not care; a glance at Molly's face showed a brighter color on her cheek, and Milly had flashed me a glance which I interpreted as approval.

When Mr. Telby rose his first few words, in which he dissociated himself from what he termed "the magnanimous conclusion to my eloquent speech," were received with favor. But no sooner did he leave the topic which alone interested his audience and devote himself to the political questions of the day than it manifested extreme restlessness. But Mr. Telby was not to be dissuaded from a speech by mere shuffling of feet and occasional calls of "Time!" He boomed on for a solid hour, and when he sat down at last the audience had appreciably thinned. A few other speeches followed, a resolution pledging the meeting to support Mr. Telby was carried, and the meeting broke up considerably less excited at the close than at the beginning.

Mr. Telby and his daughters and I drove home together. Milly sat next to me.

"Good speech, that of yours," said Mr. Telby, "though you spoiled it at the end. Whatever made you do that?"

I turned to Milly. "Did I spoil it?"

"I thought the end was the only redeeming feature," returned Milly very distinctly.

XV.

CALUMNY

At the next meeting Mr. Vicars addressed he alluded to my observations, and stated with precision that under no circumstances could he meet me on terms of friendship. "Such a friendship," he was reported to have said, "would be contamination. It was not possible to touch pitch and not be defiled!" This was evidently too strong for his audience, for the newspapers chronicled "Interruption." Whereupon, speaking with increased heat, he declared that he could not recount before a mixed audience the episodes which colored my career "with purple patches," but they might accept his personal assurances that, if he liked to speak, I should be hooted out of Trewint.

Of course, I challenged Mr. Vicars to produce his proof, and went on to say if he did not do so, he stood branded before the community as a *liar*.

Everyone with whom I came in contact expressed their utmost disbelief in Mr. Vicars's veiled allegations, but I have little doubt that most people believed that there was some foundation for them.

A month previously I should not have minded, but circumstances had changed. I was in love with Milly; I could no longer disguise that fact from myself, and it sometimes seemed to me that she was impressed, almost against her will, by the series of calumnies to which I was exposed. A young man is sometimes flattered by being regarded as a "gay dog," but this is not the case when his aim is to win the love of a pure woman.

I realized that Vicars believed every word he uttered, and I knew that Trefusis was behind him, whispering lies into his ear—lies which he was only too willing to believe. The demon of jealousy was at work in his brain and for the time being he had lost his reasoning faculty. I could understand and was even sorry for him. And yet his constant reiteration on all occasions of charges implying that I was one with whom no decent person should associate began to distress me. I once even consulted Mr. Telby's solicitor, but he advised me to do nothing.

But a reaction now set in. Mr. Vicars, people began to feel, was going too far. At one of Mr. Rapley's meetings a local butcher, who had at one time been ejected from his shop by Mr. Telby for non-payment of rent, made a speech in which he hoped, "for the sake of humanity, that it was not true that Mr. Telby was about to marry his daughter to this reprobate. If it were true, it was a shame—a crying shame. The young lady deserved a better fate." I can imagine that at this point the speaker looked meaningfully towards Mr. Vicars, for his love-story was well known in the town. At any rate, it was all over the neighborhood in a day or two that Molly and I were engaged to be married. Everyone accepted the statement as true, and I even had a letter from my sister-in-law, not expressing a doubt of its truth, but only inquiring when the engagement was to be announced.

Now, I did not contradict the rumor. It was a mere rumor, and I had a certain feeling of delicacy in speaking to Mr. Telby on the subject. I guessed he did not discourage the coupling of his daughter's name with mine, and it seemed to me best to ignore the matter.

But this gossip had a curious effect. Persons, women especially, who had been willing enough to believe me guilty of all sorts of Don-Juan-like escapades now began to frame another tale, and one not far removed from the truth. Perhaps too Mr. Telby's agent helped the rival story. It was to impute to Mr. Vicars the ignoble passion of jealousy as the motive for his animus against me. It explained everything to many minds; a reaction set in which grew, and was at its strongest on the day of the poll.

XVI.

TRIUMPH

WHEN the polling-booths closed no one ventured to predict the result. The boxes were removed to the Town Hall and the counting of the votes commenced forthwith. As the declaration of the poll was not expected till ten o'clock at the earliest, Mr. Telby decided that we should go back to Dewhurst, returning after dinner.

We were all too anxious and excited to make much of a meal, and we had hardly finished when Mr. Telby was eager to be back at the Town Hall.

"I want to be sure that all my votes are credited to me," he said. "It's just as well to see with one's own eyes that there is no hanky-panky."

I laughed, but made no objection to starting at once.

"Don't wait up, girls," said Mr. Telby. "We may be late."

"Of course we'll wait up," cried Milly indignantly. "Do you think we can sleep till we know the result?"

We drove rapidly into Trewint. Although it was hardly nine, there was already a considerable crowd before the Town Hall. Our advent was greeted with mingled cheers and groans, but the former predominated.

"The rowdy element again," I observed to Mr. Telby.

"I cannot understand," he returned testily, "why you insist on regarding my more enthusiastic supporters as rowdies."

We watched the clerks counting the votes. So far as we could ascertain, Mr. Telby led, but there were several districts still to be accounted for. We had not been in the room long when we were joined by the Liberal candidate and Mr. Vicars. They were in evening dress and had evidently been dining together.

Mr. Telby shook his opponent by the hand, but ignored the minister. "Whatever may be the result of the election, and however much I may regret the personal element that has been introduced into this contest," he said in his grandiose manner, "I trust that you and I, Mr. Rapley, will not permit our friendly relations to be interrupted."

Mr. Rapley, a quiet, inoffensive man, seemed a little alarmed.

"Oh, dear, no; why, certainly—by all means—not."

He was close to me. I held out my hand. "I don't think we've met before," I said.

He took my hand with a nervous glance in Vicars's direction. "I am pleased, very pleased, to make your acquaintance," he returned hurriedly. "Perhaps you will allow me to say I am sorry, most sorry, that—that language has been used—rather stronger perhaps—"

"Oh, strong language doesn't count for anything at election times," I said lightly. "And, you know, 'hard words break no bones.'"

"Possibly—probably not," he answered. "Yet—I am not sure that I have always seen eye to eye with my friend, Mr. Vicars, as to certain phases of this contest. However——"

"It's all over now," I observed cheerfully.

He seemed glad to quit the subject. "I've been dining at the 'Swan,'" he ran on, "with an old University friend of yours, Mr. Trefusis, a very pleasant and well-informed young man. He—he spoke very highly of you."

"Did he indeed?" I replied rather grimly.

"Of—of your abilities, at any rate." He stopped, as if conscious that he was making rather a mess of it. He looked vaguely round the room. "I expected him to follow us here."

At that moment the crowd outside, which had been passing the time by alternately cheering and groaning the two candidates, Mr. Vicars, and another individual, suddenly burst into wild and discordant yells. We all made for the windows, and a curious spectacle met our gaze.

The Market Square, which is well lighted by arc lamps, is exactly opposite to the Town Hall. Looking out of the windows we could see a surging mass of people, whose faces gleamed white in the artificial light. But we were no longer the attraction, for the crowd had shifted in the direction of the "Swan" Hotel, which faces the Market Square on its right side. In the centre of the mob there seemed to be a little, compact ball of humanity, which swayed and heaved to and fro.

"Whatever is the matter?" cried Mr. Telby, and we all echoed the question.

"About a score of men," observed Mr. Rapley after a long scrutiny, "seem to be tearing to pieces some unhappy wretch."

"A pickpocket, no doubt," I suggested.

"Ah, very likely," responded Mr. Rapley, and the interest diminished.

"But what are they going to do with him?" I asked suddenly.

"They seem to be making for the horse-trough," returned Mr. Rapley. There was a large stone trough in front of the hotel. "They probably intend to duck him."

"And quite right too," remarked Mr. Telby.

Mr. Vicars had joined us at the window. "I am not sure," he said, "that it is not our duty to interfere. I am no supporter of lynch-law."

Mr. Telby turned towards him contemptuously. "Pray go and rescue him," he retorted sneeringly. "It will be certain to make the crowd choose another victim."

Mr. Vicars did not reply, but he moved uneasily, as if unable to make up his mind.

By this time the little, solid knot of men had dragged their victim to the edge of the trough. The next moment the man's body was suspended on high by a score of arms, and then swish! it was in the trough. We could see the water pouring over the edge.

Mr. Rapley was peering over my shoulder. "What a time they are holding him down!" he exclaimed. "Do they want to drown him?"

"We must really do something," I cried impulsively. "Hang it, we can't let them kill the fellow!"

Again the man's body was lifted upward. For a moment it was poised overhead, and, swish! he was in the water again.

"Come," said I, and touched Vicars on the arm.

In less than a minute we were struggling with the crowd. We fought our way through the mob, most of whom seemed associated only by curiosity with what was passing in the centre. I lost Vicars, but we both gained the trough together.

"Stop this," shouted Vicars. "Are you men or brutes?"

The active participators in the affair were not more than fifteen or twenty men. They turned defiantly at Vicars's words. Their wretched victim was bubbling and gasping, making frenzied efforts to escape from his bath.

"It's Vicars!" cried one of the men, who seemed to be their leader. "Hooray, let's duck him!" I recognized with a sinking heart the author of the suggestion as my servant Tarling. Some of his companions made a grab for Vicars, and I think it would not have gone well with him if I had not interfered.

"This must not go on," I cried sternly, and knocked one of the men down. They turned on me, and then, for just one second, Tarling's eyes and mine met.

"It's Mr. Freddy Trewint," he shouted. "Three cheers for Mr. Freddy Trewint!"

The cheers were given, and then Tarling had the grace to disappear. I saw him no more that night.

"Let that man go," I commanded, pointing to the wretched object in the trough, and they let him go, and then, following their leader, melted away in the crowd. I went and helped the man out of his bath. If it had not been that his struggles had partially emptied the trough, I think he would have been drowned. As it was, he had almost to be lifted out.

"Will you take one arm?" I said to Vicars. "The man is half dead."

And then I noticed that, though he was in rags, his rags had once

been dress clothes. His hair was plastered over his face, but there was something familiar in his appearance. I think his identity dawned on Vicars and myself simultaneously.

"Trefusis!"

And so it was. Then I understood Tarling's participation.

"Where shall we take him?" I asked, feeling as if I were in some way to blame for his plight.

"To the Town Hall," returned Vicars. "I will send for a cab and take him home."

So we dragged the dejected wretch through the curious crowd and up the stone steps of the Town Hall. We were met by most of the members of the two election committees, headed by the rival candidates. They pressed forward with many questions.

Trefusis, still spluttering and gasping, was slowly regaining his breath. He was evidently not much the worse for his experiences, but he presented a sorry figure. His coat was in rags, and his shirt, bereft of starch, had given way at the neck, exposing his bare chest. His tattered garments clung round him like a woman's bathing costume and his course was marked by little streams of water. For some minutes before he was fully capable of speech he had been gesticulating wildly and pointing in my direction.

"He did this! He is responsible for this!" were his first articulate words.

Everyone stood round him, eying him with great curiosity, as if he were some strange animal.

"Don't—don't you think," said Mr. Rapley in his hesitating way, "he will catch cold?"

"I certainly think he ought to be taken home," said Mr. Telby. "Most remarkable incident! I cannot help feeling that Mr. Trefusis is a martyr to his friendship with Mr. Vicars. There can be no doubt that the methods Mr. Vicars has thought fit to employ do not commend themselves to an English electorate. And this is the unhappy result."

"He did this! He did this!" gasped Trefusis, impotently indicating me.

"I hope his mind has not given way," said Mr. Rapley, benevolently regarding him through folded pince-nez.

Mr. Vicars had been gloomily silent. "The matter will have to be inquired into," he said at length, "and if Mr. Trewint is responsible, he will answer for it."

"Fiddle-de-dee," returned Mr. Telby.

"I—I think he should be taken away at once," hinted Mr. Rapley gently.

"I have sent for a cab," replied Mr. Vicars curtly. "Ah, is it

there? At the back entrance? Thank you." He took Trefusis by the arm and began to lead him away. At that moment a hurried movement on the staircase made us turn.

"The returning officer is just about to declare the result of the polling," shouted someone.

"What is it? What is it?" we all exclaimed, and raced pell-mell up the stairs. Trefusis was left to shiver alone, for even Vicars deserted him. When the result was announced it was found that Mr. Telby was returned as the Parliamentary representative of the Borough of Trewint by a majority of seventy-three votes!

XVII.

FAILURE

I TOOK train for London the following day, and in the afternoon called on my brother. He welcomed me with a warmth which it has seldom been my lot to receive from him.

"So you have managed to pull the chestnuts out of the fire?" he said, shaking my hand—usually we met with a curt nod. "I congratulate you; I confess it was more than I expected. The news came while we were in committee last night, and caused a good deal of excitement. I happened to speak shortly afterwards, and they gave me a tremendous reception."

"Did they?" I asked absently.

"They felt, no doubt, that my name and influence had a good deal to do with the result."

"No doubt," I replied indifferently. "How's Mabel?"

But Mabel entered at the moment, and, fluttering up, kissed me on both cheeks.

"Dear, dear Fred," cried she. "So many, many congratulations. What a dear, clever boy you are."

"Do you know what the Prime Minister said to me last night?" asked Gerald.

"No, what?"

"Smart young fellow your brother; we ought to have him in the House."

"Did he really say that?" asked Mabel.

"He did, indeed."

"Then he's heard about it too?"

"Heard what?"

"Why, about Fred's engagement, of course."

Gerald smiled. "No, my dear, he was not alluding to that." He turned to me, and in the gayety of his heart dug me in the ribs. On the whole, I prefer my brother in his more sober moods.

"I'm not engaged," I replied curtly.

But they declined to believe me, putting my denial down to natural coyness.

"Not actually engaged, perhaps," suggested my brother, "but—well, on the border line. Eh, what? Little love-passages now and again? Ah, you dog!"

I daresay I reddened—who would not?—and this was deemed proof positive.

"You are not to tease Fred," said Mabel indulgently. "I daresay he has had to work very hard lately and is very tired. Sit down, Fred."

"I must go," I said hastily.

My brother had taken up a position in front of the fireplace and evidently intended a prolonged chat. "Nonsense!" he cried testily. "I want to hear all about the election. Is it true they ducked your friend Trefusis, as the *Times* says?"

Mabel gave a little cry. "Mr. Trefusis!" she exclaimed. "Was he at Trewint?"

"Of course he was," responded Gerald. "Vicars's right-hand man, wasn't he, Fred?"

Mabel subsided suddenly into a chair.

"I wish it had been Vicars who had got ducked," continued Gerald. "The *Times* says they would have done so if you had not intervened. If that's the case, it was the silliest thing you did during the election. By Jove, I would have given a hundred pounds to have seen it!"

"Mr. Trefusis ducked!" said Mabel in a faint voice.

I rose. "It was an unfortunate incident, which I very much regret. But I really must go. I have an appointment."

Gerald regarded me for a moment. "Do you know, Fred, you have aged ten years?"

"Absurd!" I cried angrily.

"Hasn't he, Mabel?"

Mabel looked at me thoughtfully. "You do seem more—more serious," said she. "But I like you best like that." And then she rose with less than her usual deliberateness. "Now I understand why that Mr. Vicars said all those horrid things about you—and—and I'm afraid you've been having a dreadful time. I am sorry, Fred, so—so sorry."

"I haven't been having a dreadful time," I replied, trying to speak lightly. "I've had, on the whole, a very jolly time."

"Miss Telby saw to that," chuckled my brother.

Mabel looked at me fixedly. "Miss Telby?" she repeated slowly. "I wonder if she's good enough for Fred."

"Good enough!" echoed my brother. "Great Heaven!"

I felt embarrassed. "If I ever marry," I said slowly, "it will be someone far too good for me."

Gerald put his head on one side and shut one eye.

"When is something definite likely to be fixed up between you and Telby's girl?" he asked.

"I—I don't know." And I fled hastily.

Why should they torment me like this? I walked down Piccadilly full of misery. Only a few hours ago I had walked with Milly in the gardens at Dewhurst, but how long ago it seemed! I recalled every word of our conversation, and the recollection made my nerves quiver afresh. Perhaps she was right; perhaps I should only make her unhappy. There were other women in the world. But I knew that, so far as I was concerned, there was only one.

My mind was full of our last interview. That morning I had asked her to come into the garden, and she had consented readily. As we came into the sunlight I noticed that there were black rings round her eyes, and I asked her if she were well.

"Oh, yes," she said, "except that I did not sleep last night."

"How was that?"

"I was making up my mind about something."

I looked at her quickly. "I suppose I mustn't ask about what?"

She shook her head. We were out of sight of the house, and I stopped suddenly.

"Milly," I said, "I told you last night that I wanted to speak to you before I left for town. You must know, for women always know these things, what it is I have to say."

She turned away. "Please do not go on, Mr. Trewint," she replied.

"I must go on. I love you, Milly, and I must tell you so."

"I am sorry you have told me this."

"You cannot love me?"

"I cannot marry you." She raised her eyes slowly to mine.

I stopped dead. "Why?" I asked abruptly.

"I do not think you would make me happy. I do not think I should make you happy."

"Why?"

"Do not make me explain. It will only cause you to think me what I have already told you I am."

"You mean," I said, "that I am not good enough for you?"

"I mean that we look at the world from different stand-points. Oh, I know that if I try to explain I shall only make you laugh at me."

"I shall not laugh at you," I said, grimly enough.

"We are so different," she went on desperately. "To you life isn't anything serious—the world is merely a pleasant place to pass the time. To me—oh, how priggish it sounds, but I am only telling you

what is in my heart—life is full of duties. If I marry you, I must give up what I consider to be essential.”

“You can still pursue your duties, even though you marry me,” I said.

Her forehead was furrowed. “You do not understand me,” she answered quickly. “Life is so real and earnest to me, that I cannot consent to marry a man who, by his own admission, is a mere trifler.”

I was silent. “Is that your only reason?” I said at length. “Are you sure you are not swayed by the lies which have been told about me for the last three weeks? Are you sure of that?”

She hesitated. “I—do not think so,” she said at length.

“Do you believe them?”

“No.”

“Are you certain?”

“I don’t think I believe them.”

“You don’t think?” I said bitterly.

She made a sudden movement to my side and laid her hand on my arm. “Ah, I have hurt you,” she cried, the tears starting to her eyes. “I did not mean to do that.”

“If I were to swear to you that all these stories were false, would it make any difference?”

She shook her head. “No. It would make no difference. I have thought it over, and I know that we are not suited to each other. It is far better we should part.”

I held out my hand and she put hers into it. Her face was turned away, but I saw she was weeping.

“Oh Milly, Milly,” I said, “aren’t we going to make a stupid mistake, you and I? Are we not going to part on absurdly inadequate grounds? And don’t you think we shall regret it all our lives?”

Her womanly pride was roused. “Right or wrong,” she cried with offended dignity, “I am entitled to my choice, and I have made it.”

“I believe,” said I softly, “that you love me.”

She wrested her hand from mine and turned her flushed face from me.

“Yes,” she cried defiantly, “I do love you, but I shall not marry you.” And then, without looking back, she hurried away in the direction of the house.

Was this the end? I told myself as I walked down Piccadilly that it was only the beginning. The lies that had been told about me—and I knew not what she might have heard—had influenced her, perhaps unconsciously; but her sense of proportion would reassert itself. She would reconsider her decision later. So I tried to comfort myself, but with little avail. The fact remained that the woman I loved had refused to be my wife because she deemed me unworthy of her.

XVIII.

HIS REAL FRIEND

A TRIAL, which at times seemed almost more than I could bear, was the repeated rumor of my engagement to Molly Telby. I daresay Mabel had something to do with its persistence, though, no doubt, Mr. Telby assisted. Go where I might, I was met with congratulations. I contradicted the story time after time, and people smiled knowingly and "hoped they hadn't been indiscreet." At length I got callous and let them say what they liked. After all, what did it matter? If I were not engaged to Molly, I wanted to be engaged to Milly; and if either of them didn't like the report, let her deny it. It was their business as much as mine!

I was continually meeting Trefusis. He would look at me with a grave, almost reproachful look; and I would turn away curtly, for I felt nothing he could say or do would ever rid me of the feelings of distrust and aversion with which I regarded him. He seemed anxious to show by his manner that he wanted to meet me on amicable terms, but I gave him no encouragement.

One evening, however, I happened to dine at my brother's house, and after dinner Mrs. Fielders, who was present, commenced to talk about him.

"Isn't it very, very sad about poor Mr. Trefusis?" she said.

Mabel jumped, as she always did, at the mention of his name. She had never mastered her fear that her letters to him might come to her husband's knowledge.

Gerald was standing with his back to the fire, sipping his coffee. "What about?" he asked. "Do you mean that ducking he got at Trefusis? Serve him right. 'Shun bad companions,' as the copy-books say."

"I wasn't alluding to that," Mrs. Fielders continued placidly, "though, I daresay, it has something to do with it. It must be most dangerous to be ducked. I should dislike it so very much."

"He has survived it, anyway," I said.

"Ah, but haven't you heard? The doctors say he can't live more than a few months. I never liked Mr. Trefusis; I used to discourage him almost to the point of rudeness when he hung about Mabel. Yet he is very good-looking, and it is always so sad to know that a familiar face will shortly disappear."

Mabel's face was paler than usual. "Are you sure, mamma, there is no mistake?"

"Oh, no, my dear. Everyone is talking about it. I wonder you haven't heard of it before. I saw Mr. Trefusis yesterday, and his face quite chilled me."

"What is wrong with him?" I asked.

"Consumption, I am told."

"How horrible!" Mabel murmured. Her eyes caught mine, and I confess I did not like to see in them the light of relief, for the news had shocked me.

I left my brother's house at the earliest moment and went to my club, with a half intention of speaking to Trefusis if I found him there. I told myself I had every cause to cherish feelings of animosity towards him, but at the same time I could not hear unmoved that day by day he had to confront the certainty of an early death. He had behaved disgracefully, no doubt; but, then, perhaps he realized it.

When I reached the club I found him, as it chanced, in the smoking-room with a friend, whom I recognized as an actor called Beaumont—a man with not a very savory reputation. I returned Trefusis's nod cordially. Beaumont left him shortly afterwards, and I immediately took the chair thus vacated.

"I am sorry to hear that you have not been well," I began. It was not a particularly tactful opening.

"No," he replied, "I am not well."

I was silent for a few moments. "I hope that stupid episode at Trewint did not hurt you?"

He hesitated. "No; I hardly think so," he replied at length. "Pray do not think that."

The impression conveyed to my mind was that he wished to spare my feelings.

"I trust," I continued awkwardly, "there is nothing very seriously wrong?"

He leant back and closed his eyes. "Nothing," he replied, with a little, bitter laugh, "if I could ignore what the doctors say. I feel perfectly well."

"What do they say?" I asked gently.

He raised himself in his chair. "They say I am dying."

I felt it would be mockery to offer condolences or express regret, and yet I must say something.

"I hope they are mistaken."

"And so indeed do I." He let himself fall back listlessly.

"I am terribly shocked," I said, "and I want to say how sorry I am." He did not open his eyes, but stretched out his hand, and I took it.

"Thank you for coming to me," he said, and his voice broke. "When one stands, as I do, facing the unknown, one's views of life change materially. I have done many things for which I am sorry. I have often been moved by ignoble impulses. Perhaps, though, it is only cowardice that makes me want to repair the past."

I was greatly touched. "My dear fellow, we all make mistakes."

He moved restlessly. "I am glad I have not injured you, though I admit I have tried to do so. I hope you will be happy with the girl you love; she is very beautiful." I was silent. I knew he was alluding to Molly, and it was on my lips to say she was nothing to me, but I refrained. It would have introduced a jarring note.

"Are you sure there is no hope?" I asked.

He shook his head mournfully. "The doctors say I may prolong my life a little if I go back to Australia, so I am going. But as to a cure, I know it is hopeless. It is strange how one clings to life, unhappy though it may be."

"When do you leave?" I asked, to say something.

"To-morrow week." He raised himself again. "Oh, you can't tell how glad I am you have spoken to me. It has taken a burden off my mind. For these last few days I remain in England I may consider you my friend, may I not?"

"Yes, yes."

"There is but little time left to say good-by to one's friends," he resumed wistfully. "And now that I leave so soon I should like to ask a favor of you. If you don't care to grant it, don't hesitate to say so. I shall not mind, for, after what has passed, you will be justified."

"I will do anything I can to please you."

"It is really nothing much," he went on with a nervous laugh. "You may think it pure sentimentality, but I want to feel you are once more my friend—to feel I shall not leave anyone behind who dislikes me when I go on my far journey."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked sympathetically.

"Only this. Next Thursday, my last day in England,—I leave on Friday,—a few of my friends—my real friends—are coming to my rooms to say good-by. I am going to give a farewell supper-party. Will you come as one of them?"

"Of course I will," I replied heartily.

"Thank you." He rose wearily and held out his hand. "The doctor says I must not keep late hours. But on Thursday I must risk making an exception. We are going first to the 'Empire'—it is quite a bachelor party, and I don't want it to be a melancholy one. Supper is at midnight at my chambers. Perhaps you would prefer to join us then?"

"If you don't mind," I replied hastily. "You see, I have to be at the House now most evenings."

He nodded. "Good-by for the present."

As he passed out his face was mirrored for an instant in one of the glasses with which the room is panelled. His expression haunted me. What did it mean?

XIX.

ENTRAPPED

CROSSING Hyde Park a few days later I met young Gilbert Telby. He seemed inclined to hurry on with a passing nod, but I stopped short. When a man has been hungering for weeks for news of the girl he loves, he is not likely to let her brother slip by without some attempt at conversation.

I was astonished by his altered appearance. His healthy complexion had faded to a pasty yellow, and from his nervous, anxious manner he might have passed for a detected pickpocket.

"What is the matter?" I asked almost involuntarily.

"Matter?" he repeated, with a laugh that seemed to catch somewhere in his throat. "Nothing's the matter."

"You don't look well."

"I'm all right." He traced figures on the gravel-path with the point of his walking-stick. I looked at him curiously, and he writhed under my scrutiny.

"I must be off," he muttered. "I have an appointment."

"Which way are you going?"

He pointed vaguely in the direction of Hyde Park Corner.

"I'll walk along with you," I said. He did not seem overjoyed, but we moved off together.

"How is your father?" I asked.

"Oh, he's all right."

"And Miss Telby?"

"Oh, she's all right."

"And—and your other sister?"

"Oh, all right."

"I suppose they are still at Dewhurst?"

"Oh, no; the Governor and Molly are up in town. They are staying at the Hotel Cecil."

"I will call. Did you say your younger sister is with them?"

"Oh, no; she's in Switzerland, at Caux, with her aunt."

"At Caux!" I echoed. "For long?"

"I believe she is going to stay the winter." His manner was so stiff and embarrassed that I could not help realizing he was longing to be rid of me. So I held out my hand.

"Well, good-by," I said. "Very glad to have met you."

He put a nerveless hand into mine, his eyes anywhere save on my face. His expression of misery and pain recalled in some inscrutable way Milly as I had last seen her. Moved by a sudden impulse, I put my hand on his arm.

"Are you in trouble, Gilbert?" I asked. "Can I help you?"

He gave me a quick glance, swallowing something in his throat.

"There's nothing wrong with me," he replied sullenly, "except that I've been going it a bit lately and have a beast of a headache."

"I hope that your father," I said with sudden alarm, "isn't still harping on that stupid affair?"

He looked at me vacantly. "What affair?" he asked. "Oh, about Trefusis? Oh, no; he's forgotten all about that."

I did not press him farther. It occurred to me that probably he was playing his part in one of these sordid dramas in which young men so often gain their first experiences of the bitter side of life.

"Come and look me up some day," I said.

"I'm leaving for Cairo to-morrow."

"The deuce you are!"

"And damned glad to get away too," he added bitterly. "We are putting up a bridge for the Government, and I am going as one of the assistant engineers."

"Well, I wish you luck."

"Luck!" he exclaimed derisively. "I don't know what the word means."

On Thursday morning—the day of Trefusis's supper-party—I was very much vexed to find in the *Morning Post* a formal announcement of my engagement to "Miss Mary Telby, eldest daughter of Mr. John Telby, M.P., of Dewhurst, Trewint." Who could have inserted it? The *Post's* announcements are almost invariably official communications, and I realized that everyone would accept the truth of the paragraph without question. And so it turned out. During the course of the morning I received half-a-dozen notes of congratulation, including a hurried note from my brother and an effusive scrawl from Mabel.

I was so irritated by these repeated felicitations that I penned an angry note to the editor, requesting an immediate contradiction. This I intended to dispatch at once, in order that the contradiction might appear in the next issue of the paper, but I omitted to post the letter, which I discovered still in my pocket when I was starting for Trefusis's chambers. That there might be no further delay I placed the letter in the first pillar-box I came to.

It was just midnight when I pressed Trefusis's bell. My mind went back to the last occasion on which I had stood at his door. I had not thought then that the next time I should seek admission it would be as one of his friends—his real friends, as he phrased it—gathered to bid him an eternal farewell. The whole position seemed strained and unnatural, and it was with a feeling of no little embarrassment that I crossed the threshold.

Trefusis welcomed me warmly, and I was received with cheerful acclamations by his other guests, who were already seated round the supper-table.

"Pray forgive us for not waiting," said Trefusis. "We got back earlier than we expected and these fellows pretended they were starving."

I made some reply and sat down in the only vacant chair. There were about a dozen men present, most of whom I knew more or less intimately; a few I knew by sight, and amongst these was Beaumont, the actor. He was a man whom many people absolutely declined to know. Considering the melancholy occasion, the party certainly seemed a very merry one. They had evidently made the most of their visit to the "Empire," for several could not, by any extension of the term, be called sober, and all the rest, with the exception of Trefusis himself, had evidently had as much to drink as was good for them.

The supper was a lavish one, but the majority seemed in no mood for eating. Champagne frothed and fizzed, and faces were unnaturally flushed, and foolish, pointless stories were received with roars of laughter. I do not desire to pose as a Puritan, for many a time I have been to similar gatherings and enjoyed them. But in the present case I was out of touch with the rest of the party. I entered cool and collected; they were flushed and excited by an evening's revelry. Naturally, the witticisms which appealed to them failed to amuse me. I felt as a teetotaller might amongst toppers. Ordinary good manners made me disguise my feelings, but I had not been five minutes in the room before I was racking my brain for an excuse to escape.

The room where we supped was connected by folding-doors with the room in which I had had my previous encounter with Trefusis. I was glad the folding-doors were closed, for it would have been embarrassing both to my host and to myself to have had that incident too vividly brought to our recollection.

I noticed that Trefusis did not drink much, but there was an unwonted color on his face and a glitter in his dark eyes which showed unusual excitement. I regarded him with a feeling of sympathy. There is always something pathetic about a farewell, and in the present case were we not bidding him good-by in the most solemn sense?

Supper at an end, cigars were lit and liquids in a more concentrated form circulated anew. Men rose from time to time to make maudlin speeches, which commenced in incoherency and ended in confusion. Trefusis responded to the toasts of which he was the subject with a due gravity and a certain aptness. References were continually made by the speakers in terms intended to be touching to the melancholy occasion of the banquet, and a drunken sentimentality reigned for a few minutes, to be dissipated by a loud burst of hilarity over some not very seemly jest.

I suppose it was about one o'clock when Beaumont annoyed me exceedingly by getting on his feet and proposing my health. I have

said I did not know Beaumont, and I did not wish to know him. It was, it seemed to me, a piece of intolerable impertinence that he should propose my health at all; but when he began to allude to my reported engagement to Molly I felt my wrath rising. It put me in a false position. How could I explain to this drunken crew that there was no engagement? It was distasteful to hear her name—the name of Milly's sister—mentioned by such a man and in such company.

"We congratulate him," continued Beaumont, swaying on his feet, "for he is going to marry the beautiful Molly. We should all like to marry her, but as we can't do so in this over-civilized country, why, let's drink the happy man's health."

I looked at Trefusis, mutely protesting, but he only shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly, as if to say that he was sorry, but could do nothing. There was a chorus of cheers. Some of the men present were friends of mine and gentlemen, but the keen edge of good taste soon gets blunted by an unrestrained conviviality. When Beaumont sat down I hesitated what to do—whether to say what I felt or to let the matter drop. Just then, however, a servant entered the room and handed Trefusis a card. "A lady to see you, sir," he said in an audible whisper.

Of course, there was a loud outcry. Trefusis glanced at the card, and then looked towards me with an evil gleam in his eyes.

"I cannot see her," he said. "Tell her to go away, or—or to come later."

There was a shout of protest. "We'll clear out if you like," said Beaumont. "Don't like to interrupt any little private meeting with a lady."

Trefusis frowned and shook his head. "Where is she?"

The servant indicated the adjoining room.

"I can't see her. Excuse this interruption, gentlemen, but this—person has no right to annoy me. I have done with women of this kind. She presumes on what is past."

"Oh, the naughty lady!" shrieked Beaumont. And the men laughed and shouted uproariously.

"Say I am engaged," said Trefusis to the servant. "Tell her to go away."

"Wait a minute!" cried Beaumont. "Why shouldn't we have her in? It's a damned shame to send away an old sweetheart when she comes to say good-by." The men hailed the suggestion with rapturous applause.

"No, no," expostulated Trefusis. "I won't have it!"

"Hang it all, why not?" cried Beaumont. "I want to see the dear creature. You have such good taste, Trefusis. Let's have her in!"

"Let's have her in!" echoed some of the others. They shouted

and hammered on the table; the din was indescribable. Then Beaumont, who was sitting with his back to the folding-doors, sprang up and laid his hand on the knob.

"No, no, you must not!" cried Trefusis. He half rose to his feet, but his eyes were still on mine and there was a fiendish malignancy in his look.

Beaumont disregarded him and flung open the folding-doors. In the centre of the inner room, staring at us with terrified eyes, stood Molly!

For some moments there was no movement. It was as if everyone in the room had been turned into stone. Then Trefusis sprang to the doors and closed them.

I rose from my seat and came from my place like a man in a dream. I do not think I hurried. I came to Trefusis's side, as he stood holding the handle of the doors.

"Let me pass," I said.

"I wished to spare you this," he returned.

"Let me pass."

"No, you cannot pass."

For a moment we stood still, looking into each other's eyes, and in that moment I realized the depth of malice and vindictiveness in the man's heart. I took him by the throat and flung him violently aside. He fell on the table; there was a crash of glass. Then I opened the doors, but the room was empty.

I looked back. Beaumont was assisting Trefusis to his feet. His hands were pressed to his face, but I saw blood creeping through his fingers, and I noticed a drop fell on his shirt-front.

I went out of the place and down the stairs.

XX.

POOR MOLLY

WHAT was Molly doing in Trefusis's rooms more than an hour after midnight? The interpretation which Trefusis had more than hinted at I rejected without a moment's consideration. He had planned, with his creature, Beaumont, the little drama which had been carried through with complete success from his point of view. On this point I had no doubt. Everything, in fact, was very clear to me except Molly's presence. How had he secured that? I paced the floor of my room till dawn dimmed the electric light, trying in vain to find an answer.

With all his cleverness he had missed his mark. He had intended to injure me through the woman I loved; but I did not love Molly. It was my duty, of course, to see she was put right in the eyes of the world, for she had borne my burden. But, still, Molly was not Milly.

Supposing—I felt the sweat on my brow—supposing he had not blundered and Milly had faced that drunken crew! Supposing his shameful artifice had left these shameful thoughts in the minds of these men of Milly—Milly whom I loved? Thank God, she had been spared that! I stopped dead, and my breath came heavily. Yes, he would have had his revenge, but, by Heaven! he should have suffered.

I could not think of the danger Milly had escaped without a sickening sense of horror. I found myself muttering “Thank God, it was only Molly!” and I was ashamed of myself. How selfish I was! Surely my solicitude for poor Molly’s honor should be as intense as for that of her sister. But it was not. If it had been Milly! I bowed my head in my hands and shuddered. As it was only Molly, I resumed my self-possession and decided very clearly that my course of action was, first of all, to discover for what reason or by what lie he had induced her to go to his rooms at such an hour, and then to make him avow, in the most public way, his share in the dastardly trick.

I went to bed at length, and slept soundly till late the next morning. I abused Tarling for not calling me at my usual time, had my bath, dressed, and breakfasted, proud that my brain was calm and clear, and looking forward almost eagerly to my crusade on Molly’s behalf.

I went straight to the Hotel Cecil and ascertained that Molly was in. I sent up my name, and after an interval her maid came to say her mistress was not feeling well enough to see me.

“Is Miss Telby out of bed?” I asked abruptly.

“Oh, yes, sir.”

“Then tell her I must see her.”

The maid departed on her errand, and I waited irritably for the answer. When the woman returned, it was to repeat that her mistress could not see me.

I was annoyed. Here was I burning to put an end to the horrible slanders which I guessed only too well were even at that moment circulating from lip to lip, and the foolish girl was throwing a preliminary obstacle in my way.

“Tell Miss Telby I must and will see her,” I said sternly. “And if she won’t come down to me, I shall insist on going up to her.”

The maid retired in a flutter, but came back shortly and asked me to follow her. I was shown into the Telbys’ sitting-room, and after a time Molly came in.

“I am sorry to seem peremptory, Molly,” I began, “but it is essential that I should speak to you.”

“It is not very kind,” she answered, a distinct frown contracting her usually placid brow.

“Yes, it is kind. Please sit down.”

She sat down with an obvious ill-humor that brought her father to

mind. "I did not sleep well last night," she said resentfully, "and I was having a nap when you called and disturbed me."

"You were up late last night?"

She gave me a quick glance. "Not very."

"It depends, of course, on what you call late."

"I went to bed at eleven."

I was taken aback. Did the silly girl mean to deny her unhappy escapade?

"Molly," I said bluntly, "what were you doing in Trefusis's rooms at one o'clock this morning?"

The color faded slightly from her cheek. "What do you mean?" she cried. "And how do you know?"

"I was there."

"You were there?"

"Yes."

She looked at me with her great eyes. "Do you intend to tell father?"

"Good Heaven, no!"

She sighed gently. "I am glad you don't think it your duty to tell father. People always seem to think it their duty to repeat disagreeable things. There were a lot of people in that room, but I couldn't recognize any faces. Do you think anyone recognized me?"

"Yes," I responded grimly.

"Will—will they think it their duty to tell father?" she asked anxiously.

"Very possibly."

She sighed again. "I am afraid he will be cross."

"What were you doing there?" I asked after a moment's interval.

"I—I went to see Mr. Trefusis."

"Why?"

She looked at me gravely and shook her head.

"You must tell me," I insisted.

"I cannot. Please don't press me, because I can't tell you."

I rose. "Now look here, Molly, don't let us have any nonsense. A great many people saw you there last night, and it is sure to get about. And—and people will misunderstand. The only thing to be done is to explain why you went there."

"Do you mean that I must tell everyone the real reason why I went there?" she asked, with dilated eyes.

"Yes. What was it?"

"I can't tell you."

"You must tell me."

"I don't think it is very kind of you to press me when I say that I can't tell you."

I was baffled. "But will you tell Milly?"

"I shall tell no one," she answered with decision.

I sat down again. "My dear Molly, you don't understand how serious the matter is. Trefusis is a blackguard. Do you know what he pretends?"

She shook her head wearily.

"That you went to his rooms because—you were fond of him."

I watched the blood surging over her face.

"He says that?" she asked.

I nodded.

"He—he says I went to see him, because I was—fond of him?"

Again I nodded.

"Oh!"

I waited for some further reply, but none came.

"Why did you go, Molly?" I asked softly.

She sat still, looking almost vacantly in front of her. The color had died away as suddenly as it came. "Why does he say that?" she asked at length. "I hardly know him. I cannot understand why he says that."

"Because he has a grudge against me, and he thinks it will hurt me. He believes we are engaged to be married."

She did not speak for some time, but sat gazing into immeasurable distances.

"I see," she said at length. "And people will believe him?"

"Possibly."

"They will think I am not—not a good woman?"

"Some might think that if we don't explain your true reason."

She was silent for so long that I grew impatient. And then she smiled—so sweet, so transcendental was her face that I recalled involuntarily the Sistine Madonna.

"And yet I cannot tell," she murmured. "I understand what you have said, and yet I cannot tell." She rose. "Thank you for calling. I am sorry I was cross at first. I see now why you came. Thank you."

She moved towards the door, but came back.

"This won't make any difference between you and Milly, will it?" she asked wistfully.

"No, no," I said hotly. "But, Molly——"

She shook her head. "Don't press me any more, Fred, dear. I understand everything, though I am often so stupid at understanding things. But it is impossible for me to tell."

She went out of the room, closing the door softly.

I had congratulated myself that morning on my cool, clear brain. My pride was gone now. Frankly, I was in a state of the utmost

mental confusion. I picked up my hat and made my way into the street. What was to be done? The only suggestion that rose from the depths of my clouded imaginings was to hunt out Trefusis and wring his neck.

I directed my steps towards my club, and in Pall Mall I ran across young Fletcher, who had also been a guest of Trefusis's the previous night. He nodded in an awkward and shamefaced way, and would have passed on if I had not stopped him.

"Tell me," I said, "what happened last night after I left?"

He fidgeted, first on one foot and then on the other.

"Oh, well," he replied, "we had to take Trefusis to a hospital——"

"A hospital! Why?"

"His face got badly cut on some broken glass when you—when he fell on the table."

"Is he there now?"

"Yes; the doctor said he couldn't possibly sail to-day. You see, some vein or other had got cut, and he bled a good deal before we could get him seen to."

"He really did intend to sail to-day?"

"Oh, rather; he worried like anything when he found he couldn't go."

"Curse him!" I said curtly, and turned to go. Fletcher touched my arm.

"I say," he said nervously, "we were blackguards last night. I am ashamed—I really don't know what to say."

"Were you in the plot?" I cried fiercely.

His obvious astonishment disarmed me. "What plot?"

"That lady was brought there by a despicable trick of that blackguard, Trefusis. It was all a put-up job by Trefusis and Beaumont to injure me."

There was an expression of incredulity on his face which he tried in vain to disguise. "I am so glad to hear that," he answered after a moment's pause. "Of course, I guessed it at once. Oh, yes, of course, that explains everything."

I turned away, sick at heart. That is what my friends would say to my face, and even behind my back, if they thought it would serve me. But they would not believe it.

I passed a restless night, and rose the next morning sick at heart. At breakfast I opened the *Morning Post*, and the first thing that met my eyes was a contradiction of the report of my engagement to Molly. I had entirely forgotten sending it to the paper, and I realized at once that I had unwittingly dealt Molly another damaging blow. Everyone would say I had broken off the engagement. The notification, coming at that moment, would be regarded by an ever-growing circle as absolute evidence of Molly's guilt.

I spent some days in a state of indecision, and the need to consult someone pressed on me more strongly as the days went by. But whom? There was my brother. His platitudes would drive me mad. There was Mabel. What sensible suggestion could I expect from her? I wanted someone with a clear head and a sympathetic heart, who would accept without proof the fact of Molly's innocence. There was only one person in the world who could help me, but she was at Caux. Still, there were steamers and trains.

I rang the bell. "Tarling, pack my bag."

XXI.

MOLLY WRITES

OUR meeting was not long delayed. As the train drew near the station, the first person I set eyes on was Milly. She was dressed in white (though the detail is not relevant), and she was leaning on the balcony of the platform, looking vaguely at the train crawling in her direction. She did not notice me till I had alighted and stood by her side.

"Why, Fred, wherever did you drop from?" was her greeting. So far as my observation went, she turned neither red nor pale.

"I have dropped straight from London," I answered.

"It's very jolly, anyhow." She looked at me with her bright, frank smile. "How pale you are looking! I'm afraid you've been working too hard. However, it's sensible of you to take a holiday. And how nice of you to come here. Are you alone?"

"Quite alone."

"Oh." Her eyes dropped.

We moved on towards the hotel. "What luck to meet you like this!" I said.

"They bring up the English mail about this time, and that always fascinates me. Look, there it goes." She pointed to a man with a bag over his shoulder. "You can have no idea how I long for news here. It's a shame to say it when the scenery is so beautiful, but for all that I am dreadfully bored. And so I go to meet the mail every day."

"Are you intending to stay here long?" I asked.

"I don't know. It depends on aunt. Are you?"

"That depends on you."

Her color deepened. "Oh, bother!" she observed.

"No; I don't mean that at all," I said in a great hurry. "Not in that sense."

"What sense?"

"Oh, well; you know!"

Her eyes met mine and she laughed very naturally. I laughed too, but ruefully.

"You mean," she said, "you don't intend to be a nuisance?"

"No, certainly not." Hang it, why had I not worked in those well-chosen words? "The fact is, I came over to get your advice about something very important, and my movements will depend on what you think had best be done."

She was gratified. "You want my advice as to something important in your career? How splendid that you should have a career!"

"Well, it's not quite that. It—it concerns Molly."

She glanced up quickly. "And Mr. Vicars?"

"Bless me, no."

Milly seemed disappointed. "I thought perhaps something had happened, but nothing ever happens nowadays."

"About Vicars and Molly?" I asked curiously. "What do you want to happen?"

"What do I want to happen?" she repeated. "I don't think you need ask that! I want Mr. Vicars to ring at our front door and say, 'Molly, I've come to marry you.' And I want Molly to answer, 'Why, certainly.'"

"And won't she?"

"Not without papa's consent, which she never, never can get. By the way, have you forgiven Mr. Vicars?"

"Why, of course I have. That man, Trefusis, was at the bottom of all those lies. I hope you've forgotten all that nonsense?"

She raised her eyes gravely. "Oh, yes, I've forgotten all that nonsense."

A pause ensued that lasted till we reached the grounds of the hotel. "But why are you so eager that Molly should marry Mr. Vicars?" I asked at length.

"Because they love each other."

"Is that a sufficient reason in all cases?"

She disregarded my question. "Poor Molly," she went on, a trifle hurriedly, "has such a hard time of it, simply because she is a martyr to that horrid mental disease, 'duty to one's parent.' She will miss happiness in this world simply because she won't say, 'Blow papa!'"

"It wouldn't be ladylike," I said reprovingly, but Milly did not heed me.

"Of course, Mr. Vicars isn't a hero, but she loves him. I know Molly's nature so well. She will never love anyone else all her life."

"I hope Molly will find happiness somehow or other," I said rather sadly.

We had reached the hotel entrance. A porter came up and handed Milly a letter.

"It's from Molly!" she exclaimed, and began to open it.

"Don't open it here," I interposed hastily. "There are so many people about. Let us go where we can be alone."

Something in my tone struck her. "There is something serious the matter?" she asked quickly.

"Yes."

Without another word she put the letter in her pocket, and we left the grounds of the hotel. She led the way to a path that struck across the mountain side. We came to a retired seat, from which we could see the Lake of Geneva, stretched out far below.

I watched her face as she turned over sheet after sheet covered with Molly's big, scrawling writing. The little dent between her eyebrows deepened.

"What *does* all this mean?" she asked with a sudden glance towards me as she turned a page. I made no answer, for I felt she had better get hold of Molly's version. Page after page she turned, and once she smiled, and my heart lightened. Suddenly, as she neared the end, she gave a startled exclamation, and a great wave of color flooded her face.

"He—struck her!" she cried, with a half-sob. "He struck her! Oh Molly; my beautiful Molly!"

"Who struck her?" I exclaimed, jumping off my seat.

"Father," she murmured. She finished the letter with burning cheeks and compressed lips. And then she rose, and, turning away, dried her eyes with her handkerchief.

We did not speak for some minutes.

"Does she explain why she went there?" I asked at length.

Milly shook her head. She gathered up the sheets of notepaper that lay scattered about the seat.

"Shall I read this to you?" she asked.

"If you think it best."

She began to read the letter, but could not control her voice. "Read it yourself," she said, and handed it to me. I read:

"MY DEAR MILLY: Oh, how I wish you were with me, for I don't know what to do or where to turn for help. I cannot live with father any longer. But where to go I do not know. I have decided to go somewhere, but where I do not know. If you were at home, you would know at once, but it is so difficult for me to settle things. But, in any case, I shall leave father.

"I am going to a place called Sanquhar in Dumfriesshire, in Scotland. There is a hotel advertised called the 'Queensberry Arms,' and I shall stop there. As soon as my box is packed I shall drive straight to the station, and I shall be in Sanquhar to-morrow. Father will never guess, nor will anyone. I tell you, because I want you to come straight to me and tell me what to do.

"Oh Milly, things have been terrible! Late one night,

it was past midnight, I went and called on Mr. Trefusis. This will shock you, *but I had to go*. I wish I could tell you why, but I have solemnly promised not to tell anyone. Oh, how I wish I could tell you.

"I was shown into a room by a man-servant, and I could hear the voices of men in the next room, laughing and talking. Suddenly the folding doors were flung open and a whole heap of men's faces were staring at me. I was very much astonished and frightened. Then Mr. Trefusis shut the doors quickly, and I hurried away, and got into my cab, and drove back to the hotel.

"The next day Fred called on me. I am afraid I fibbed at first. But he said he was one of the men, and so it was no use. He said I must tell him why I went to Mr. Trefusis, and explained why. Oh Milly, it is terrible for me to have to write this. He said people would think I was a bad woman if I did not explain, and that Mr. Trefusis was going about saying I was a bad woman, and that was why I had gone to his rooms. But, oh Milly, you know it wasn't.

"I asked him why Mr. Trefusis said such wicked things, and Fred explained that Mr. Trefusis thought we were engaged, and he hated Fred, and so was trying to hurt him by saying I was bad. Fred begged me to explain why I went to Mr. Trefusis's rooms, but, Milly, dear, I could not. I saw Fred was very much moved, for he was pale and his lips trembled, and he hadn't that lazy, laughing, indifferent manner which you used to hate in him.

"The next day father and I went into the Park. You know how father loves to go into the Park and bow to people. We met Lady Maud Ponticherry, and she took no notice of father's bow, and stared at me in the rudest way. We also met Sir Gerald and Lady Trewint, and they pretended not to see us, and then the Duchess of Hillstown, whom father was so pleased to know, stared right at us and never bowed in the least.

"Oh Milly, I began to understand it was because they all thought me a bad woman!

"I did not say anything to father, who was in a terrible temper. He could not understand it. And, oh, I was so afraid he would find out.

"The next day we went to an 'At Home' at Mrs. Clive's. I did not want to go, but father insisted. It was terrible. Mrs. Clive shook hands so very coldly, and not a single woman spoke to me. But father was in a better temper, because the men spoke to him.

"The next day he found out. Oh Milly, he came to me and asked if it was true, and I said it was. Then he asked why I went, and I could not tell him. I could not, dear, because I had solemnly promised to tell no one. Oh, you believe me, don't you? He was so angry—he struck me. Oh Milly, Milly, if you were only here, I could bear it so much better.

"But I cannot stay here any longer. I am going away

to-night to Sanguhar. You will come there, won't you? I have plenty of money. Oh Milly, it is terrible to be thought a bad woman! But even if I were bad, other women should not be so cruel. That would not be the way to make me good again.

"You will come soon, dear Milly? Oh, do come soon!

"Your loving sister,

"MOLLY."

I finished the letter and laid it down.

"When can we leave?" asked Milly in a constrained voice.

"Not before to-morrow."

"At what hour?"

"Ten."

"I shall be ready."

"You will speak to your aunt to-night?"

"Yes, of course."

We moved slowly back towards the hotel. Milly turned to me suddenly.

"Have you any idea why she went to——"

I shook my head. "I was going to ask you the same question."

When we came to the gate that led into the hotel grounds she stopped suddenly.

"How tired you must be after your long journey!" she said remorsefully. "And I have never even thanked you."

"I don't want any thanks," I replied. "Do you understand that poor Molly is suffering for me?"

She nodded. "He—he thought it was Molly you loved?"

"Yes. He made a mistake, for which I thank God."

She looked at me gravely. "I would to God he had made no mistake."

XXII.

MOLLY RETURNS

I PASS over with few words the trouble we had that night with Milly's aunt. I have no doubt she was an estimable old lady, though she insisted on regarding me as a wicked young man, which is an awkward and embarrassing role to fill. I do not think we treated her with much tact. Milly introduced me in a somewhat casual way as Mr. Fred Trewint.

"I have heard of you," the old lady said severely.

I expressed my gratification, though the old lady's expression indicated that what she had heard was not entirely favorable. Probably she had studied the local papers at the time of the election.

It was not conciliatory of Milly—but she was obviously preoccupied—to announce briefly that she was leaving for England the next morning in my company. The old lady's face was a study.

"A word with you alone, Millicent," she said, and led the way with

great stateliness to another apartment. When Milly joined me later she was in a state of amused exasperation.

"The dear old thing wants to come and chaperone you—or is it me?" she said. "I have had great difficulty in making her change her mind. However, I have promised to take her maid."

We left the next morning and travelled through to London without stopping. I could have wished the maid had remained behind, for her presence was somewhat a bar to our mutual confidences. However, we were able to discuss at considerable length our course of action.

"I shall go straight on to Sanquhar," Milly declared.

"But you can't go on living there for ever," I objected. "What is to be your next step?"

Milly gave a little shrug. "I suppose I must see father and arrange something."

"I'll tell you what, Milly," I said with sudden inspiration, "why shouldn't you and Molly stay with my sister-in-law?"

Milly stared at me. "I don't think that would be very pleasant," she replied frankly.

"Perhaps not; but won't it help?"

Milly looked at me thoughtfully. "I have been thinking how very injudicious it was of Molly to disappear just at this time. I expect it has made things ever so much worse."

"Why shouldn't we pretend that she has been with my sister-in-law the whole time?"

Milly came over slowly to my view. "But what will Lady Trewint say? Perhaps she won't like it. In fact, I am sure she won't. You must remember that Molly, from her own account, has been cut by everyone, including Lady Trewint."

"That will be all right," I answered confidently. "To tell the truth, Mabel is to blame for the whole affair. It was in helping her I first incurred Trefusis's enmity——" I stopped rather abruptly.

"Was she the person for whom you 'burgled' Mr. Trefusis's rooms?" asked Milly guilelessly.

I looked at her in a startled kind of way. "I am afraid you know too much!"

"Seriously," said Milly, "I hardly like to put this burden on Lady Trewint. Of course, I realize how much her protection would mean to Molly, but——"

"Let me see Mabel, at any rate," I interposed. "Before I left town I wrote and told her the truth about the matter. I don't suppose she had received this letter when she met Molly. I expect to find her very eager to do all she can."

"Well, you must promise not to press her," said Milly.

When we reached London there was only time for Milly to catch

the night express for Scotland. The maid I dispatched back to Caux.

I wrote a line that night to Mabel to say I should call at eleven the following morning. I knew Mabel well enough to recognize the wisdom of warning her before making a morning visit. The next morning when I called she received me, in a becoming tea-gown, with effusion.

"Oh my dear Fred!" she cried as I entered the room, "what agony of mind you have caused us!"

"Very sorry," I answered, nodding to Gerald, who was present.

"And where the devil have you been?" asked my brother, not returning my salutation.

"Oh, I had to run over to Caux."

"A nice kettle of fish you left behind you," he growled.

"Did I? You must remember I know nothing."

"Oh Fred," Mabel broke in, "do, do tell us everything! Where is that Telby girl? She didn't run away with you, did she?"

"Bless me, no," I exclaimed, astonished.

"People have been saying all kinds of things," said Mabel. "Mr. Telby has absolutely no restraint, and he has let everyone know the girl has run away. Some say she went with you, and some say she is hiding till Mr. Trefusis is well enough to leave the hospital, and some declare she has committed suicide! Oh my dear Fred, there never was such a muddle!"

Gerald eyed me sternly. "I know as a fact that you nearly killed Trefusis. A day or two ago the rumor ran through the clubs that he had died, and that a warrant was out for your arrest. I am not a nervous man, but I confess the news alarmed me. I rushed over to the Home Office to see the Home Secretary. Luckily he was able to reassure me, but I spent a very unpleasant quarter of an hour."

"I am very sorry."

"But where is the girl?" persisted Mabel. "Do you know?"

"Oh, yes; I know."

"Where is she?" they cried together. "Where has she been all this time?"

"All this time," I replied solemnly, "she has been under this roof."

They were silent in astonishment for a moment, and then Gerald burst into one of his paroxysms of abuse.

"As foolishly and feebly flippant as ever," he exclaimed, "although even at the moment the hangman's noose is round your neck. Frederick, you are incurable. Pray leave me."

"Not till he has told us everything!" cried his wife. "Now, Fred, dear, do be serious. Tell us everything right from the beginning. I received your letter, asking me to circulate that very thin story about Miss Telby being inveigled by a trick, and I have tried to do so.

Frankly, it hasn't caught on. People say 'What trick?' and I have no answer."

"I know," I answered moodily. "That is what they would say. We must find out why she went there. It is our weak point not to know."

"Won't the girl explain the trick, if there was one?" asked Gerald.
"No."

"Hum." There was no difficulty in interpreting the expression on his face. "Fred, my lad, you've had a narrow escape."

I rose. "Gerald," I said solemnly, "you are utterly wrong. Miss Telby is as pure as our mother or your wife."

Gerald rubbed his nose dubiously. "Maybe, but circumstances——"

"I know all about that," I interposed impatiently. "And I want your assistance in explaining them. After all, you are chiefly to blame. I don't know what Mr. Telby and you thought you had arranged between you, but I am pretty sure these rumors of my engagement to Molly would not have been so persistent if you had not encouraged them."

Gerald seemed embarrassed. "It would have been an excellent match if she had only——"

"Possibly," I said, "but that is not the point. These rumors led Trefusis to injure her reputation in order to damage me."

My brother screwed up his face. "This story of revenge sounds very 'cock and bull,'" he replied. "Why should Trefusis want to injure you?"

"There were reasons," I replied evasively, aware that Mabel was in a state of nervous tension. "For one thing, we came into conflict at the election."

"Oh, of course," said my brother, "you hired some roughs to duck him."

"I did nothing of the kind," I cried with indignation; "though I know he thought I did."

"The same thing," replied my brother. "Well, no doubt, that would not dispose him favorably towards you. Your story is that he decoyed the lady he thought you were going to marry to his rooms, and revealed her suddenly, under compromising circumstances, to a crowd of drunken young men in order to destroy her reputation and so revenge himself on you?"

"Yes," I replied. "These are the facts."

"Rather an elaborate reprisal for a simple ducking, eh?"

"Trefusis is not an ordinary man," I answered, "and he had other reasons for hating me—reasons which I can't go into."

My brother shut one eye. "I suppose that means you quarrelled

over some woman," he said coarsely. "Well, well, if that's the story, we must make the best of it for want of a better."

"Why did she run away?" asked Mabel. "That was so foolish of her."

"Her father—struck her."

Both Gerald and his wife were shocked. "Confounded brute!" cried Gerald.

Mabel put her handkerchief to her eyes. "Oh the poor child!"

"So she went to a little town in Scotland, and there she still is," I continued. "I rushed over to Caux to fetch her sister. We came back last night, and she has gone on to Scotland to join her sister."

"You are taking a great interest in the matter," observed Gerald, regarding me curiously. "I hope you are not 'gone' on the girl after all."

"Not in the least."

"I'm glad of that," he said more cheerfully. "Well, what do you want us to do?"

I paused a moment. "I want Mabel to telegraph to Miss Telby, inviting her and her sister to come and stay here."

"Impossible," said Gerald unhesitatingly.

Mabel was silent, and I regarded her anxiously.

"Remember," I said in a low voice, "Molly has suffered for me."

Mabel came to a sudden resolution. "Why, most certainly," she replied. "I shall be most delighted if they will come here."

"Will you send a telegram?" I went to her writing-desk.

"Why, look here," expostulated Gerald, "I won't have this."

I handed Mabel a telegram form and a pencil without a word.

"You want her to come at once?" asked Mabel.

"Of course."

"I understand." She scribbled some words and handed me the paper. "Will that do?"

I nodded and added the address. "May I ring the bell?" I asked, and rang it without waiting for a reply.

"Am I a cipher?" protested Gerald.

The footman appeared. I handed him the telegram. "Let that go off at once," I said.

When the door closed I turned to my brother. "I am sure you don't really object, Gerald," I said. "Remember what she has suffered, and if Mabel takes her up it will mean so much."

"Oh, I daresay," he grumbled, "but I want to know why I am to be entangled in the affairs of the Telby family?"

"Well," I returned, turning, I expect, rather red, "there is one reason. The fact is I—I hope some day to—marry Miss Milly Telby."

"Oh Lord!" exclaimed Gerald. Mabel stood transfixed for a moment, and the next she was embracing me.

"Oh Fred," she cried, "and you never told me! What is she like? Is she pretty?"

"She will have plenty of money, at any rate," observed my brother thoughtfully, "but at the same time——" He strode up and down the room.

"You see," I resumed, after I had satisfied Mabel as to Milly's personal attributes, "I want to put Molly right for my own sake as well as hers."

"Of course," acquiesced Gerald, "this makes all the difference." He frowned thoughtfully. "A scandal blows over very quickly in London. The girl must explain why she went to that man's rooms. People will believe anything if it is put plausibly. But, confound it, why did she bolt?"

"Why can't we say," suggested Mabel quickly, "that she has been here the whole time?"

"Why not, indeed?" I asked.

Gerald took hold of the idea quickly. "When can she get here?" he queried.

"To-morrow morning," I replied. "They will leave by to-night's train."

"I will take Molly for a drive in the Park to-morrow," said Mabel. "What a sensation it will cause! And I'll make a few calls this afternoon and tell a few people, in strict confidence, that she has been with me the whole time."

"Of course," I said modestly, "I am not yet quite engaged to Milly. I only hope——"

My gentle disclaimer was ignored. "Telby ought to be very much obliged to us," remarked Gerald, "for all the trouble we are taking to arrange his family affairs. And I shall see he does not forget it when the time comes for settlements."

"And, Gerald," said his wife, "as soon as the girls arrive you had better see Mr. Telby and tell him they are here. It will never do for him not to believe our story. You must see to that."

"Oh, I know the brute!" returned Gerald. "As soon as he hears Molly is at our house, and knows about Fred and his other daughter, he will be as cock-a-hoop as possible."

It was a relief to feel that the matter was safe in Mabel's hands.

"Well, I must go," I said. "Thanks for all you have done and will do. And, Gerald, really and truly, Molly is innocent."

"Of course she is!" cried Mabel indignantly.

"No doubt at all," responded Gerald drily, "under these altered circumstances."

XXIII.

MATCH-MAKING

THE two girls arrived at my brother's house early the next morning, and my sister-in-law entered vigorously the same day upon her task of rehabilitating Molly in public opinion. The process Mabel adopted had, at any rate, the merit of directness. It was effective too amongst the circle that admitted her social leadership. She let it be known that no one who was not convinced of Molly's complete innocence need call at her house. It became at once an article of faith amongst her set that Molly was an "injured darling," and very soon no gathering was deemed complete without the lioness, or rather the lamb, of the hour.

One day Tarling came to say that Mr. Vicars had called to see me.

"Oh, show him in," I said, greatly surprised. What could have brought him?

He came in, evidently ill at ease, and we did not shake hands. "I hope you will not consider I am intruding," he said constrainedly, when the door had closed on Tarling.

"It is no intrusion. Won't you sit down?"

He sat down and cleared his throat nervously. "I have come to ask you a simple question, and I will not beat about the bush. Perhaps you will think it a strange one, but I cannot help that."

"I shall be pleased to answer it, if I can."

"Then tell me where Miss Telby is."

"Is there any mystery about Miss Telby's whereabouts?" I asked, rather surprised that he had not learned what the whole of London had known for a week past.

He made a gesture of almost passionate appeal. "For God's sake, do not fence with me! Oh, I know you have cause to hate me, but do not let our past relations prevent your helping me now."

"Why do you come to me?"

"To whom else can I go?" he cried fiercely. "I have heard the miserable story which couples your name and Trefusis's with hers. I cannot get information from Trefusis, and so I come to you. I have sought for her in vain. If you know where she is, tell me. I want to go to her and tell her that I, at any rate, do not believe the lies that are in everyone's mouth concerning her." He rose excitedly. "She must need me now if she is in misery and alone. You have cast her off! You can have no reason now to keep us apart."

"Let us understand each other," I returned slowly. "You say I have cast Miss Telby off. You have no right to say that; it is not true."

He stood and looked at me with something like terror on his face. "Not true?" he repeated; and then he sank back into his chair and covered his face. "I hoped—I believed there was good in evil; that a

merciful Providence had allowed her to be the victim of these slanders merely that her unhappy engagement to you might be broken off."

"If Providence has so acted," I said drily, "it has acted on insufficient information. I was never engaged to Miss Telby."

He raised his head. "Never engaged?" he repeated.

"Never. You have fallen into the same mistake as your friend Trefusis. I am not and have never been engaged to her, and at no time have we had any desire to be other than friends. I will admit," I added after a pause, "that I have a warmer feeling for her younger sister."

His eyes were full of doubt. "Trefusis told me that you had admitted your engagement."

"Then he lied," I replied briefly.

"Why should he lie?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "There was a feud of a kind between us. Poor Molly has suffered at his hands because he believed I loved her."

"Then you do not believe in her guilt?"

"No! She was enticed to his rooms by a trick. I don't know what trick, but I shall find out. I am only waiting for Trefusis to leave the hospital to force him to tell me the truth."

He shook his head. "He will never tell you."

Something in his tone struck me. "Why do you say that?"

"I saw him yesterday. If he has sinned, God has taken the punishment into His own hands."

I started, for I thought he meant Trefusis was dead. "Surely," I cried, full of a sudden dread, "his—accident has not killed him?"

"No, he is not dead. It would be better for him, perhaps, if he were. God has taken his reason from him."

I regarded Vicars with open mouth. "Do you mean that Trefusis has gone out of his mind?"

"It is so."

I could not speak for a time. "It is so unexpected," I murmured. "And yet—I wonder if it is!" I wiped my forehead. "What are they doing with him?"

"He has a mother in Australia. They are sending him to her."

I was gradually recovering from the shock the news had given me. "Am I—was the accident in any way the cause?" I asked suddenly.

"I understand not."

"It is really a very sad business," said I, considerably relieved that I was not responsible. "It is curious that I have never considered him quite sane."

"You have not told me Miss Telby's address," said Vicars, evidently desirous of leaving the subject.

"She and her sister are staying with my sister-in-law, Lady Trewint."

He gave an exclamation of surprise. "Does she also believe in Miss Telby's innocence?"

"Of course," I said stiffly. "No one who knows Miss Telby believes otherwise."

"Oh!" He began to walk about the room. "I wonder if I may call on her?"

"Why not?"

He regarded me with almost eager gratitude. "Trewint," he said impulsively, "if I have misjudged you in the past, you must pardon me. I fear I have allowed myself to be made a tool of." He stopped suddenly and looked at his watch. "Will you kindly let me have the address?"

"Certainly." At that moment there was a ring at the door, which I guessed must be Milly and her sister, for it had been arranged that we should go together to the Academy that afternoon. "I will do more than that; I will bring her to you."

I left the room quickly, and, forestalling Tarling, opened the door.

"Molly," I cried, even before she was across the threshold, "I have a visitor for you."

Her great eyes opened. "Not papa?" she asked affrightedly.

"Good gracious, no. Mr. Vicars!"

She gave a little sob. "Oh, what does he think of me?"

"He thinks what we all think, dear Molly, and he is dying to tell you so." I took her by the arm and led her to the sitting-room door, which I opened. "Go in and talk to him, like a good girl," and I pushed her gently in and closed the door again.

"I don't know what we are to do, Milly," I said. "I have only one sitting-room, and that is engaged. We shall have to go and sit with Tarling in the kitchen."

"That will do very nicely," she made answer. "Perhaps he will let me make tea."

So we went to the kitchen, much to Tarling's astonishment. I expressed a fear that we were out of cake, and he discreetly disappeared.

"If that couple in the parlor don't emerge with everything fixed," I said complacently, "I shall be surprised."

Milly laughed. "I don't want to criticise, but, personally, I should not like to be hustled into a room, even to receive a proposal."

"I will adopt a different method in your case," I said.

"Oh, I sha'n't require any help," Milly replied hastily.

"Are you sure?"

"Don't let us talk any more nonsense," she said, coloring. "I want to talk seriously. Night and day I think about Molly. I lie awake wondering why——"

"So do I."

"There must be some explanation if we can only find it—something quite simple and obvious. What is it?"

"I have given it up."

"It is the only thing I care to talk about," she replied, "and until Molly is cleared I shall not talk about anything else."

"I haven't anything to say about Molly," I replied sullenly.

"Fred, don't be cross or stupid. I want to ask you something about——"

"Molly?"

"About Gilbert. I want to ask you whether you think he can know anything about the matter?"

"Gilbert?" I repeated. "Why, he was hundreds of miles away when it all happened."

"Then you don't think he has anything to do with it?" She seemed half-relieved and half-disappointed. "It seems wicked to think one's brother is in any way to blame, but the thought keeps coming into my mind."

"Has he heard of the—scandal?"

She shook her head.

"Write and tell him," I said briefly.

"Do you think I ought to?"

"Certainly. He is sure to hear, and it will be better that he should hear of it from you than from a stranger. And if he can throw any light upon it, I suppose he will do so."

"I will write at once," she answered.

At that moment the sitting-room door opened and Molly and Vicars appeared.

"I ought, perhaps," said Vicars, with unusual nervousness, "to tell you that Molly has promised to be my wife."

I expressed great astonishment and Milly hugged her sister. After I had tendered my congratulations, which were received with irritating complacency by Vicars, we settled down to tea. When this was finished, Milly declared it was time to go home, and we all set off together. We walked through the Park, and it took a long time. When we arrived at my brother's house we left the ladies at the door, both Vicars and myself deciding not to go in.

We walked away together, and neither of us spoke for some time.

"I need not assure you," he suddenly burst out, "that I have the utmost faith in Molly, but I will admit it would gratify me if she would tell me why she went to Trefusis's rooms."

"Did you ask her?"

"I hinted at my natural desire to know, but she would not tell me." His brow contracted slightly. "Of course, I did not press her,

for I have implicit confidence in her. At the same time, it would be a satisfaction to hear her explanation."

"Oh, just so."

"Please understand, however, that my trust is absolute. Ah, there is my 'bus. Good-day."

XXIV.

GILBERT'S STORY

My brother was deputed to call on Mr. Telby and inform him of his eldest daughter's matrimonial intentions. He heard the news with little concern.

"I have already cast her off," he said.

Gerald had some little difficulty in making him understand that the house of Trewint had championed Molly's cause, and that she must be at once received back into her father's favor. As soon as Mr. Telby realized that Gerald was convinced of Molly's innocence, he was quite ready to be convinced also. Gerald explained, at length, that Molly had been inveigled into Trefusis's rooms by a trick.

"Oh, a trick?" said Mr. Telby doubtfully. "Is that so, indeed?"

Gerald assured him that such was indeed the case.

"And—er—by what trick?" asked the anxious parent.

My brother waved an arm to signify details were unnecessary, and Mr. Telby did not pursue the subject.

"If you are satisfied, Sir Gerald, then I am too," he observed. "And if Molly wishes to marry that—parson, she's welcome to do so. Under the circumstances, she cannot expect a better match."

"I want you to see Molly and explain to her that your doubts are at an end. I hope too you will meet Mr. Vicars on friendly terms. It will look better."

"Oh, quite so." Mr. Telby began to see that expediency pointed to an unconditional acceptance of the situation. "Of course, I want to help the unhappy girl—and the sooner she gets married the better."

One evening, on returning late to my chambers, Tarling intercepted me at the door to tell me that Gilbert had been waiting my return for some hours. I went into my sitting-room and found him sleeping peacefully on the sofa.

"Why, Gilbert, this is a surprise!" I said, laying my hand on his shoulder.

He started up, rubbing his eyes.

"How late you are!" he cried. "And how you frightened me! I thought it was someone come to take me to prison. I've been here hours. What time is it?"

I glanced at my watch. "It's past twelve. Where have you sprung from?"

"I got a letter from Milly, and I started at once. I have come

straight here. But I mustn't keep you out of bed. I will go away, and come back to-morrow."

"You don't leave this house to-night," I said firmly. He was looking thoroughly washed out. I got him a brandy-and-soda, and a touch of color came to his face.

"Milly's letter frightened me. She asked me to see you if I knew anything about—oh, what a brute I have been!"

"Tell me about it."

He covered his face with his hands. "It was all my fault. I asked Molly to see Trefusis, and to promise solemnly to tell no one. I never guessed the man would be such a blackguard. Oh, when I meet him—if I dare—but I sha'n't dare!"

"You need not fear him any more," I replied. "He will not trouble us again."

"Oh, you don't know him! If I were not a coward, I should kill him! If I were not a coward——"

The despair in his voice made me feel both pity and contempt. "How did Trefusis get you into his power?" I asked.

Gradually he told me the story, and a sordid story it was. His companionship with Trefusis had opened the door to many extravagances and other follies. He owed Trefusis and others of his set far more than he could pay. Beaumont, in particular, who had pressed money on him in the earlier stages of their acquaintance, became the most urgent in his demands for payment, finally announcing an appeal to Mr. Telby. The threat threw Gilbert into a panic, and he begged Trefusis for assistance to clear off Beaumont. Trefusis regretted his inability to help him personally, "being short himself," but hinted that Gilbert's own bill, if backed by a "good name," could easily be negotiated. He told Gilbert that it would not matter for what period the bill was—it might be for three years—if only it were backed by a substantial name.

Trefusis seemed to have played his cards skilfully, and by innuendo rather than by direct suggestion he put into Gilbert's head an easy method of shelving his difficulties for three years. At any rate, Gilbert brought Trefusis a bill at three years purporting to be accepted by Mr. Telby.

It would be absurd to pretend that Trefusis did not know that Gilbert had forged his father's signature. He must have known that a wealthy man like Mr. Telby would not hand his son an accommodation bill to hawk about. However, Trefusis took it without a word, and the cash was at once forthcoming. Whether the plot he finally matured was at that time in his mind, or whether he simply wished to get a hold over Gilbert—the only son of a wealthy man—I cannot say. Immediately after Trefusis's return from Trewint, at the close

of the election, he sent for Gilbert and told him, with every appearance of concern, that the holder of the bill had discovered the forgery and had determined to put the matter into the hands of the authorities, but that, at Trefusis's earnest entreaty, he had agreed to do nothing for a few days.

"Of course," Gilbert explained to me, "I thought it was a mere matter of finding the money, till Trefusis made it clear that the holder—he said his name was Leslie, but I don't believe now there was any holder except Trefusis himself—was determined to inform the police from a high sense of public duty."

I nodded. "A natural explanation. People always act from the highest motives when they refuse to be merciful."

"Trefusis seemed very much upset. He said if it had only been a matter of money, he would sell his shirt rather than allow any harm to come to me. You can imagine what a state of mind I was in. I was just starting for Egypt, but, as Trefusis explained, I could easily be extradited."

"It was thoughtful of Trefusis to remind you of that."

"The day before I left I saw Trefusis, and he told me that he had done all he could for me, but without success, and that I might expect to be arrested any day."

"And what did you say in reply to this cheerful information?"

He flushed a dull brick color. "I am ashamed of the exhibition I made of myself. I—I quite lost my head, and I—behaved like a school-boy—or rather a school-girl, because a plucky boy would die rather than do what I did. I—broke down and blubbered, and implored Trefusis to help me—and altogether—— Bah, I am sick when I remember it!"

"Your nerves were overstrung," I said consolingly.

"I wish I had shot myself," the lad resumed moodily. "I should have done so, if I hadn't been such a coward. Just when I had utterly given up all hope, he told me very reluctantly that there was just one possible chance."

"And that was——"

"He said that Mr. Leslie was a very upright and honorable man, but very obstinate—except to women. He went on to hint that if by some means Molly were to intercede for me, Mr. Leslie might relent."

"I see."

"Of course, I didn't like to bring Molly into it, but it seemed the only way. In the end, I wrote Molly a long letter just before starting for Cairo, telling her everything, and begging her to see Mr. Leslie, but asking her solemnly to promise to tell no one. I gave Trefusis the letter, and after I had left England got a line from Molly full of sympathy and affection, saying she would do what I asked, and especially

promising that she would keep the whole affair an inviolate secret. I heard nothing more about the matter till I got Milly's letter."

To make an end of Trefusis and his methods, I may here say it afterwards appeared that he called at the Hotel Cecil and handed Molly Gilbert's letter, who, in her blind devotion to her brother, was ready to do anything. Trefusis pointed out that if Leslie knew that Molly wished to speak to him on her brother's behalf, he would be certain to refuse to see her. He therefore suggested, and Molly willingly agreed, that she should call at Trefusis's chambers the next afternoon at three o'clock, when Trefusis would make every effort to have Leslie present.

Molly called at the hour mentioned, but only saw Trefusis, who showed her a telegram from Leslie saying he was detained. What was to be done? Trefusis explained that as Leslie was to accompany him to Australia early the next morning, it was impossible to arrange a further meeting. It was true, he admitted, that Leslie was staying with him overnight; but then, as the telegram stated, he was not to be back till after midnight, and it was, of course, impossible for Miss Telby to see him at such an hour. Molly, greatly distressed, jumped into the trap. She offered eagerly to call at any hour of the day or night to see Leslie, so that she might save her brother.

Molly kept her appointment by the simple expedient of descending from her bedroom shortly before the hour named and requesting the night porter to summon a cab. Possibly the request surprised the night porter, if night porters can be surprised. At any rate, Molly got a cab and drove to Trefusis's rooms, with the results that have already been detailed.

XXV.

THE END

WHEN Molly learned that her brother had made a clean breast of his share in the episode which had resulted in so much suffering to herself, it might not unreasonably have been expected that she would have welcomed her deliverance from an unpleasant suspicion. But this was not the case. So unreasoning was her devotion to her brother that the mere suggestion that Gilbert should bear the consequences of his own folly roused her to leonine wrath. Her anger directed itself chiefly against poor Vicars, who really had less than anyone to do with the unhappy affair. She was indignant because he would not exercise his authority and prevent disclosure of the true facts. When Vicars pleaded that he had no authority, and that in any case her good name was dearer to him than Gilbert's, she declared in her anger that she would never speak to him again, and that their engagement was at an end.

Vicars in his distress came to see me, thoroughly cowed. "I

think," he said, "we had better let things rest. As Molly points out, if the facts are known, it will mean a disgraced life for Gilbert. Besides, we shall live in the country. Really, I don't think the public have a right to a fresh scandal."

I am glad to say that Gilbert manfully declined to agree to this cowardly policy.

"Molly," he said slowly, "will not be cleared until it is known why she went to Trefusis's rooms. She went for my sake, and everyone must know it."

It was Mrs. Fielders who, with her usual acuteness, hit on the via media that was finally adopted.

"Why not tell the truth," she suggested, "every word of it, save that one word, 'forgery'? Let us say that Gilbert was being pressed for money, and that Molly went to intercede for him. I think that will do well enough, especially"—she added in an aside—"as no one takes much interest in the matter since she has decided to marry a dissenting parson."

It was difficult to get either Molly or Gilbert to accept this suggestion, but at length, after a conference in Mabel's drawing-room that lasted a whole afternoon, the proposal was agreed to by all parties.

As soon as the difficulty was settled I noticed Milly slip away. I followed her and found her on the balcony.

"Are you satisfied?" I asked.

"It is a compromise. Are compromises ever really satisfactory? Poor Molly!"

"But Molly is going to be very happy."

"Oh, yes," she replied brightly, "I feel certain her troubles are over, and she will be happy."

"There are others in the world beside Molly," I ventured timidly.

"I must go in," she said.

"Not yet, Milly," I begged. "You must hear me out. I asked you once to marry me, and you refused because I was unworthy. I am still unworthy."

Her face was turned from me.

"I suppose I am a compromise too," I went on. "Good and bad intermingled, and the bad predominates. I slither along the surface of things with hardly a thought of their depth. Lately I have been trying to delve beneath the surface, but I have only made some pitiful little scratchings. I am afraid I remain very much as I have always been. On my merits I have no case, but I love you."

Her face was still turned from me, and it was long before she answered.

"You say you are unworthy of me," she whispered. "Oh Fred, haven't you found me out yet? If you compare me with Molly, you will see how petty and superficial I am. I couldn't have sacrificed myself for Gilbert as she did."

"I don't want you to sacrifice yourself for Gilbert, I only want you to sacrifice yourself to me. Don't turn away from me, Milly, because I want to see your face. Give me your love, Milly, for I require your help. With you by my side, I think perhaps I can go on digging."

And then she turned towards me, and there was a look in her eyes which I trust will never pass away while life lasts.

"Fred, I love you. You know I have always loved you."



SPRING RAIN

BY LEWIS WORTHINGTON SMITH

THE cry of the water-courses for the songs of the forest children,
The hint of the freshness of springing green where the winter
drift has lain;

A hope of the world-wide spaces in the balm of the wind's caresses,
And deep at the heart of the underworld the joy of the roots in rain.

The shiver of plashing footsteps where the rushes drink and tremble,
The glint of the April-changing sun on the drop of leaf-held dew;
The joy of the home-returning of the wind-winged prairie children
To paths that the grasses bend above and the wild things loiter
through.

The strength of the horses ploughing in the breath of the meadow
grasses,
The subtle sense of the earth astir beneath the ploughman's feet;
The hopes of the hills at even ere the twilight lamps dissemble,
The will to be going on and on where the long, long highways meet.

The world is a world of distance for the feet of the wildwood children,
The rivers would have them follow on, the grasses bid them stay;
The near and the far are passions when the south wind breathes upon
them,
And all of the rover instincts wake and the joys of the dream-free
way.

LAFAYETTE'S LAST VISIT TO AMERICA

By Theodore Stanton



THE failure of Lafayette's bold attempts to overturn the government of the Restoration by revolutionary means and conspiracies; his defeat at the general elections in the winter of 1824, when the Cabinet in power, having had recourse to intimidation and even illegal measures, obtained a most complete victory and reduced the Liberal minority in the Chamber of Deputies to nineteen, Lafayette and a score of other distinguished Liberals being among the unlucky candidates; and his consequent political eclipse in his own country,—such were the chief causes which decided him to seize this momentary relegation to private life to visit the United States.

Referring to this visit, M. de Viel-Castel, the well-known French historian, says in his monumental "History of the Restoration:" *

"The accounts of Lafayette's triumphant tour, eagerly printed in France by the Opposition newspapers, were a sort of consolation to the Liberal party, a compensation for the reverses which they had experienced throughout Europe during the past few years. On seeing one of their leaders thus honored by a powerful people and government, they felt that their own principles were not dead, and that from the land where these principles had, so to speak, taken refuge, they might possibly one day come forth to invade once more the Old World. They went on to say that the career of Lafayette, whose active phase seemed at an end, was thus worthily crowned. But nobody would then have ventured to predict that within a short time Lafayette would exercise on the destinies of France an influence greater, perhaps, though still more short-lived, than that which he had exercised forty years before." (A reference to the part played by Lafayette in the Revolution of 1830, which placed Louis Philippe on the throne.)

The writer of the following letters (here published for the first time), George Washington Lafayette, was born during the American war, and was, on this account, Washington's godson. Having embraced the military career, he was promoted lieutenant after his father's release from prison at Olmutz. As aide-de-camp to General Grouchy,

* "Histoire de la Restauration," Vol. XIV., p. 62.

he distinguished himself in the campaigns of Italy, Austria, and Poland, but was never in favor with Napoleon I., owing to his father's opinions. In 1815 he entered political life, and was several times in Parliament until 1824, when he accompanied his father to America and shared in the enthusiastic welcome accorded to the latter. In 1827 he was again in Parliament and sided with the Extreme Left after the Revolution of July. He was Lafayette's only son. Like Lafayette himself, and all the Liberals of this time who used to meet at Lagrange, the family seat of the Lafayettes, he was intimately acquainted with Ary Scheffer, the distinguished Franco-Dutch painter and Liberal political agitator, to whom these letters are addressed.

THEODORE STANTON.

PARIS, March, 1902.

"ON BOARD THE CADMUS, AT SEA,

"This 12th of August, 1824.

"After a thirty days' passage, here we are, so to speak, at the gates of New York, without being able to get in. There only remain about fifty leagues to do, but, the wind failing, we are making no head-way at all. However, I still hope we shall reach our destination before the departure of the boat that leaves on the 15th, and that should bring you this letter.

"On the vessel we have been looked after as well as could be, and though we have been seasick, that is not the fault of the Captain or of the weather, both having been most charming in their treatment of us. My father has suffered the most, which was to be expected; next to him among the invalids must be ranked Bastien, then your humble servant, and then Levasseur.* But to-day none of us have had any real reason to complain. We are naturally a little impatient, being becalmed, but must grin and bear it. We have often regretted you as a friend, my dear Scheffer, sometimes too as a painter, for even with the ladies' weather which our sailors say we have had, we have witnessed some splendid sea-and-sky effects you would have liked to see too.

"I leave my letter open in order to finish it at New York."

"OFF NEW YORK, August 14, 1824.

"Our voyage is terminated, my friend, but we cannot wait in order to write till we land, for the ship that is to carry our letters is just on the point of sailing. We are well."

* Lafayette's secretary and friend, author of a work entitled "Lafayette in America," Paris, 1829. Bastien must have been one of the General's numerous acquaintances.—T. S.

"ON BOARD THE STEAMBOAT ARRIVING AT NEW YORK
"on September 5, 1824.

"We have already spent twenty days in the United States, and this is the first leisure I have had for writing you a line; even as it is, I am not sure of being able to dispatch my letter. The *Stephanie*, whose Captain is one of our friends, is to sail from New York for Havre to-day, and will take our letters, if only we can arrive in time.

"Ever since we have been here my father has been the hero, and we the spectators, of the most imposing, beautiful, and affecting sights, the most majestic population in the world welcoming a man with common accord, and conducting him in triumph throughout a journey of two hundred leagues. Women wept with joy on seeing him, and children risked being crushed to get near to the man whom their fathers kept pointing out to them as one of those who had contributed the most to procuring them their happiness and independence. This is what it has been reserved for us to see. I am knocked off my feet—excuse the expression—by the emotions of all kinds I experience. I won't enter into details; you know me, and do not suppose that, amidst the excitement of a happy people's public rejoicings, and sharing in the extraordinary gratitude with which my father is overwhelmed, I shall forget at any time those who have a claim on all the sentiments which my heart is capable of feeling. God grant that I may always enjoy the necessary strength to discharge the whole of my duties. But since being here I have not slept more than four or five hours each night!

"They are most anxious here to have engravings of my father's portrait, and I cannot conceive why the first packet from Pinard has not yet arrived. I have only seen two or three here. The various municipal authorities have already asked my father to allow his portrait to be painted by Stuart and Trumbull, because they are Americans. I am far from denying the talent of the two American painters, but, in my humble opinion, a portrait painted in France, if it could be sent here, would compare favorably with any done in this country. I therefore think, as also my friend Levasseur, that you would do well to forward us not the original, but a copy of your great picture.* Out here they have no idea of a picture of this kind. I am quite aware that the copy might possibly be sacrificed, but, on the other hand, considerable good might be the result, and, after all, it would only be a copy lost. If you consent to my proposal, you must manage to have the copy ready to leave Havre, framed and packed in a box, by Novem-

* This portrait was presented by Scheffer, on Lafayette's death, to the latter's family, and it now hangs at Lagrange, the old family residence of the Lafayettes.

ber 21. Captain Allyn,* of the *Cadmus*, on whose vessel we came to America, would willingly bring it, I am sure."

"NORFOLK, October 23, 1824.

"MY DEAR SCHEFFER: It is a long time since you had a letter from me, but really it is not my fault. Up to now we have been traveling all the time, or else occupied with my father's affairs whenever we have been alone, so that we may claim our friends' indulgence. The French newspapers having received orders not to make known to our families our safe arrival in New York, we feared you might not be aware of all that has taken place here since we landed. During the two months and a week that we have been in the United States not a single day has passed that was not a day of triumph for my father, for the cause he has defended all his life, for the principles the application of which has secured the happiness of this country, not an instant that did not arouse its emotion in your poor friend's heart, which has had a good deal to bear. The time glides away very pleasantly for us here, but as we think of the future, we find that we are living at a terribly high pressure, and, when we meet again, you will see me much aged, I fancy. It is impossible to experience day after day an excess of gratitude, joy, anxiety, and admiration without being somewhat fatigued. However, the first act of my father's official life will soon come to an end, and for a month or six weeks we shall be able to live more as private individuals with Mr. Jefferson, with Mr. Madison, and at Washington.

"Your engraving of my father's portrait is thought to be a good resemblance, but I am of opinion that people in this country do not value the art sufficiently for the worth of your engraving to be realized. No doubt, Captain Allyn has conveyed you the letter in which I suggested you might send here a copy of my father's portrait; a copy of Franklin's would, I believe, be welcomed also. A foreign painter, however talented, has to compete with the indulgence accorded here to artists in general, as also with the spirit of nationality; yet the two portraits I speak of are so much superior to all the paintings, without exception, which we have seen in this country that I imagine they would be admired. To send the originals would, of course, be a pity."

* Victor Jacquemont, the celebrated explorer, who in 1826 embarked for America, speaks several times in his published correspondence in terms of the highest praise of Captain Allyn, who conducted him as far as India. "Captain Allyn," he says in one place, "is a mild and even-tempered man and, what is more for an American, merry. Even in the worst weather, and though wet through four times in a single night, he never swears. On the contrary, when he goes down to change his clothes, and anyone asks him about the weather, he gently taps the barometer and replies jokingly, 'Set fair.'" ("Correspondence inédite," Vol. I., p. 53.)—T. S.

" WASHINGTON, December 7, 1824.

"I am impatiently waiting for the copy of my father's portrait which you are sending by Allyn. I long to rejoice at my friend's success in these parts, since I cannot do so in parts where I am not. I believe that you will do Congress an honor by offering them this present, and, as my father's son, I thank you, for such an offer was the only way of leaving this country a proper portrait of my father. Luckily, Stuart has not yet arrived. I say luckily, for if he had painted the portrait in question, he would probably offer it to the United States. With regard to the head, he is the only painter capable of supporting comparison with you. As for the body, whether it is that he is not equal to the work or that he is unwilling to take the trouble, he entrusts this part to the hands of others, and these others have a way of their own! Any way, your triumph will be an easy one, but no less splendid for all that, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that your picture will be a model for the United States. I need hardly say that I appreciate your kindness in intending the original for my children.

"Although we have a little more free time, yet, on account of Congress assembling, and, consequently, of Senators and Representatives arriving, we have a great many social duties to perform, not to speak of the goodly number of kind correspondents, I am thankful to say, we have from France. Independently of the happiness your company would have afforded us here, my dear Scheffer, we have often regretted your not being with us from an artistic point of view. Levasseur and I have frequently admired vast landscapes which would have made a great impression on your mind and spirit, and we have not seldom experienced emotions which would also have touched your heart and been of service to your talent."

" ON BOARD A STEAMBOAT ON THE JAMES RIVER,

" January 26, 1825.

"MY DEAR FRIEND: The portrait has at last arrived. It had been shipped at New York on board a small coasting schooner which sailed a fortnight later than had been announced. Poor Allyn was in a great way! I am thankful to say I have been able to restretch it, put it in a frame, and, what is more, at the Capitol. There it will stay for a few days to satisfy the impatience of the public, after which it will come back to the house of Mr. King,* an admirable and most successful portrait-painter, and, in addition, a very kind young fellow, who has undertaken to stretch it afresh, to varnish it, and to have some parts of the frame touched up. As a likeness your picture is univer-

* Charles Bird King (1785-1862), the well-known portrait painter, was a resident of Washington at the moment of Lafayette's visit.—T. S.

sally esteemed, by those even who cannot judge of its merit, and those that are judges are struck with it and consider it as the best thing they have seen in this country. So you may enjoy the fruit of your labor and your success. We have explained to the Speaker of the House of Representatives that your intention had been to offer the portrait to the two chambers, both sitting in the same building, the Senate being here a popular chamber quite as much as the House of Representatives. In fine, everything has turned out well, and we shall soon have news of the inauguration of the portrait, which has not yet taken place.

"You must scold your packers well, and another time you must see to the packing yourself. As they had no boards broad enough to form the bottom of the box, they had the stupid idea to put a third board in between the other two, and did not even take the trouble to plane it down to the same level, so that the rough edge of this board tore the canvas from the knee to the middle of the body. Fortunately, Allyn gave a look at the box at Havre, had the picture unpacked and rolled up, and at New York the rent was mended. As luck would have it, the damaged part was among the clothing, and it is difficult even for one who knows that there has been a tear to see where the place is.

"By the various dates of our letters you may guess we don't remain long in the same spot. Every one is so kind to my father here and would like to keep him with them. We are shortly to undertake a little journey of eighteen hundred leagues by land or by litter, and only a hundred and thirteen days to do it in, including the various stays on the road. It will be a novel journey, and will be, I hope, the last one before the welcome voyage that will bring us back to France. Our country, our families, our friends are dearer to us than ever, and the more we admire this country, the greater the need we feel of loving our own. Every day we fall into the sin of envy, when we see good fathers of a family, good husbands, good friends with their children, their wives, their acquaintances, while we are here far away from ours."



APRIL

BY CHARLES FRANCIS SAUNDERS

A WIND that blows from out the south,
A sparrow's song, a fleeting shower,
And where but now a snowbank gleamed
The sun lying warm in the heart of a flower.

A LUCKY STRATAGEM

By Florence Kingston Hoffman



ROBINSON stood at the first-floor window and gazed dejectedly into the street. Without, a shining brass sign proclaimed the residence of John V. Robinson, D.D.S., but this, alas! was the only luminous thing in Robinson's prospect—introspective or otherwise.

He was a clever young fellow, and had graduated from the College of Dentistry with honors, but there it had ended. In a word, he hadn't got on, and the fact that it was really in no wise his fault didn't make the reality any easier to bear. He had left Hillcrest for New York feeling sure that a big place was likely to produce bigger results than a small one, and had selected his office (after anxious days and wakeful nights) in a block already so bristling with dental signs that it fairly made one's teeth ache only to walk that way. Robinson's idea had been that, in strict pursuance of the parable, crumbs from the other dentists' tables might in due course provide for his own—but so far this brilliant forethought had been most unproductive. Then there was Carrie! Carrie and he had already been engaged for three long years, and on the day in question there seemed just as little prospect of their ever being able to marry as in the beginning; and, to make matters worse, Mrs. Marston, Carrie's widowed mother, had given him clearly to understand that she, for her part, was thoroughly tired of this state of affairs, darkly hinting that if he couldn't do better for Carrie, others could and should. Altogether, he felt desperate, and as he gazed moodily forth, viciously envious of the probable patients who from time to time crossed the threshold of Dr. James Bennett, his opposite neighbor, his attention was suddenly arrested by the sight of a portly old gentleman who came leaping up the street as though he were sprinting on the track.

"Humph!" ejaculated Robinson. "Well, he can't keep up that gait long, for apoplexy will put a stop to his little game, whatever it may be," and then he almost lost *his* breath as the old gentleman bolted up his own doorstep, rang the bell furiously, and with an anxious look behind entered the vestibule, closing the door with a bang that shook the house.

Recollecting how long it usually took his landlady's maid of all work to answer the bell, and feeling sure that the emergency must be serious, Robinson ran to open the door, and the old gentleman, still

panting from his recent exertions, bounded in with such haste that he narrowly escaped overturning Robinson into the umbrella-stand.

"My dear sir—my dear doctor—let me see, what is the name?" apologized the visitor.

"Robinson," mildly supplemented the dentist as he righted his equilibrium.

"Oh! indeed! to be sure, Dr. Robinson. Will you—that is to say, could you—examine my teeth without delay? The fact is I'm in something of a hurry."

"So I had noticed," Robinson was beginning, when, remembering professional dignity, he went on: "Well, sir, I might be able to oblige you—if you will—ah! permit me to run my eye over my list. I think I might perhaps work you in between engagements." He proceeded to take from the desk a small book whose entries ran somewhat like this:

Mrs. Jones, for back rent	\$50.00
Four pairs hose	1.00
Tea, sugar, etc.94

and examining it with great care, his back turned to the newcomer, he concluded,—

"Yes, sir, I think I can manage it, if you will kindly lay aside your coat and take the chair."

With a sigh of relief the old gentleman divested himself of his outer garments, and sank into the depths of the dental chair as though it represented to him a bed of ease rather than the throne of torture.

His breath was still coming irregularly and he seemed most unduly flustered, a fact Robinson couldn't help remarking as he drew forth the drawers of instruments, filled a tumbler with water, and bustled about with a great show of activity, devoutly hoping his patient mightn't notice how absolutely new everything was. He adjusted the headrest, and then, as the old gentleman obligingly opened a cavernous mouth, prepared to make an examination, almost groaning aloud as he noted the well-preserved molars and bicuspid exposed to view, and wondered how he could arrange anything like a decent amount of work for himself without feeling unpleasantly like a thief.

Discovering an almost infinitesimal cavity, he proceeded to adjust the rubber dam, napkins, and various paraphernalia of his calling, when the front-door bell rang, and the old gentleman, gripping the chair-arms, rose so suddenly to an upright position, and gasped so violently, that he came within an ace of swallowing napkins, rubber dam, and even the weights pendent from the latter in one gulp before Robinson could relieve him.

Seeing that his patient was listening with painful intentness, Robinson forebore to speak for an instant, and then, as the outer door closed and the servant could be heard shuffling back to the regions below, the old gentleman put his hand to his heart and trembled like a leaf, while Robinson hesitated whether to run for a doctor or to offer his patient whiskey and water.

"My dear Dr. Robinson," the latter finally managed to articulate, "I feel I owe you an explanation, and I will endeavor to be as brief as possible."

"I am, I would have you to understand, a man of most exemplary habits, generally speaking, but we all—ah! have our moments of relaxation, not to say excess,—'errare est humana,' you know,—and so I—oh! confound it, perhaps you know how it is yourself?" Robinson bowed, and his patient resumed: "Last night I dined with some friends, and may perhaps have been a little injudicious in the amount of wine I drank—mind, I don't say I was, but such may have been the case. After dinner we went to the theatre, where my friends procured a box; and later they prevailed upon me to go behind the curtains and make Miss Zaza Flashlight's acquaintance. All this, you will readily understand, was harmless in the extreme, but it was perhaps a trifle unwise of me to ask Miss Flashlight and several of her company to be my guests at supper after the play. We had a merry time, sir, a very merry time, though my recollections of the affair, beyond the fact that we all ate considerable and drank rather more, are, I may say, exceedingly hazy. I spent the night at a hotel, and awoke this morning with a terrible headache and the impression of having passed through a prolonged nightmare. Arriving at my office, I found among my letters this—ah—bombshell!" producing a note which he offered to Robinson, who read aloud as follows:

"Amos Whitehouse, Esq., 110 Broadway, New York City.

"MY BELOVED: After a night of feverish unrest,—for how could I sleep with such happiness in view?—I awoke to remember I had promised you an answer by ten o'clock this morning. Yes, dearest, I will be your owney doney wife, and almost before you have read this I will be at your office to arrange about dates, etc.

"Till then, your lovey dovey,

"ZAZA."

As Robinson read the last words the old gentleman resumed in great agitation:

"When I tell you, my dear sir, that it was then ten-fifteen, and that even as I looked from my second-floor office window I saw approaching a figure that I instantly recognized as Miss Flashlight's, you may imagine my feelings. I grabbed my hat and top-coat, and

allowing her enough time to inquire her way to my office and take the elevator, I boarded the down-car and fled from the building just after the up-car started on its journey. I tore madly up the street" (Robinson smiled, remembering), "but just before I reached your door I glanced behind and saw her in hot pursuit. She was more than a block away, but even at that distance Miss Flashlight might be easily—ahem!—remarked.

"The rest you know. I took refuge here, but I realize only too well that within a very few minutes my hiding-place is bound to be discovered, and when I tell you, my dear sir, that my beloved wife, already twice widowed when I married her, is of a peculiarly jealous disposition, that I owe my yearly stipend of fifty thousand dollars to her generosity, and when, last of all, I remind you that this might mean not only a suit for breach of promise, but a charge of attempted bigamy, you will appreciate my desperate predicament, and if you can formulate any plan whereby I may escape from this critical situation, let me say that you may draw on me for one thousand—no, two thousand—dollars, and count, moreover, on my patronage for life."

Robinson's well-brushed hair fairly rose at this proposition, and like an inspiration came the recollection of sundry feminine garments at that moment hanging in his closet. Two nights before, when Mrs. Marston and Carrie had come up from Hillcrest to accompany him to the theatre, they had been overtaken by so severe a storm that the latter had borrowed his mackintosh and a silk muffler for her head sooner than run any risk of spoiling her new hat and cloak.

With a mental photograph of his beloved's horrified countenance, Robinson set about collecting her properties.

Having persuaded Mr. Whitehouse to conceal his substantial proportions in Carrie's cherished cloak and then to resume the dental chair, he draped his nether limbs with a much beruffled silk table cover (presented him by Carrie as a Christmas gift), reflecting as he complacently surveyed the graceful folds which, flowing from the chair, so well simulated a skirt, that possibly he might have risen more rapidly to fortune as window draper for a department store than as a D.D.S. He then pulled a Japanese screen close behind the chair, thus completely concealing the head of his patient from anyone entering the outer room, at the same time placing Carrie's new hat in a conspicuous place upon the table. Hardly were these arrangements completed when the doorbell rang violently, and, dropping a large napkin over his patient's head, he began operations with a hastily inflated gas-bag usually calculated to permit the removal of the most obstinate molar without pain.

After a few loud words in the passage there was a clatter of high heels and the frou-frou of silken petticoats as a blond female of most

engaging appearance pranced excitedly into the room. Robinson affected not to notice her entrance as he continued to say in soothing tones, "My dear Miss Harrison, I implore you not to fight against the gas in this fashion; it only prolongs your pain. Yield to it, I beg of you, and in a moment more all will be over."

By this time the blond lady stood between the folding-doors, endeavoring to command attention.

"Madam," said Robinson indignantly, "I must beg of you to withdraw immediately. I am in the midst of a painful operation, and they should have informed you at the door that I could not be disturbed."

"Sir," said the lady, calming down somewhat under the influence of his imperative tones, "I must ask you to pardon this unwarrantable intrusion, but I am in great trouble. I am seeking for a very dear friend,—I might add, my affianced husband, Mr. Whitehouse." (Here the patient's legs trembled so violently that Robinson in turn trembled for his draperies.) "I saw him enter a residence within this block, and am at present making what might almost be called a house-to-house search" (with a nervous laugh), "as my business with him is of a very pressing nature."

"You see plainly for yourself, Madam," said Robinson blandly, "that I am the only male occupant of these rooms, nor have I the pleasure of knowing the gentleman in question. The other apartments in this house being all rented to middle-aged ladies of highest respectability, I cannot encourage your further search, and once more must insist upon your withdrawing." With which ultimatum he firmly conducted the dashing blonde, now almost hysterical, to the outer door, turning a deaf ear to all her entreaties for assistance in tracing her truant lover.

Having seen her safely in the street, he reentered his rooms, carefully locking both doors, and still carrying the now depleted gas-bag under his arm, he rejoined the unhappy victim, who, minus cloak and table cover, sat mopping his wet brow.

"My friend," said he, "I may say, my very dear friend, I am forever yours to command, for you have rescued me from the most deucedly awkward scrape of my life. Even now, however, I cannot consider myself entirely out of danger, but must ask the shelter of your hospitable roof until evening, when, under cover of the darkness, I can safely depart in a cab."

So there all day he remained, and a busy one it proved for Robinson. First an inquiry was sent for a stateroom on the big White Star boat, sailing the following day. This soon brought an affirmative answer; and a second epistle was dispatched to Mrs. Whitehouse, in which her loving husband broke the joyful news and bade her get ready to accom-

pany him, deploring the fact that a few last matters of great importance would require his attention and keep him from her side until the evening. Lastly, his partner was sent for, and as much information as seemed desirable confided to his keeping, and when at length the shades of evening descended upon the aforesaid dwelling, Mr. Amos Whitehouse (having first sent Robinson to reconnoitre) crept, a sadder and a wiser man, into the waiting cab.

As he wrung Robinson's hand in parting he said tremulously: "I sha'n't feel positively safe till I'm actually on the ocean, but again let me thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kindness. From this day forward you shall care for the teeth of every member of my family with whom I have a particle of influence, and meanwhile I beg you to accept this trifling expression of my eternal gratitude" (which was a check to the order of J. V. Robinson for two thousand dollars).

"Truly," said Robinson, as the cab rolled away, and sinking into a chair he gazed, still half incredulous, at the check in his hand, "'There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood leads on to fortune.'"



WHEN APRIL CALLS

BY INGRAM CROCKETT

OUT where the sun-bright clouds are blown
O'er the wistful sky,
And the voice of the brook, in an undertone,
Floats silvery by,
And the moon, like the ghost of the moon of night,
Walks cold and lone on the distant height.

Out where my fieldward fancy wills,
Where the pipes of Hope
Are sweet, heart-heard, on the greening hills
Where the redbuds ope—
And the call of the blackbird bell-like rings
From a blossoming bough where he swings and sings.

Out to the mystery of the change,
To the beckoning dream;
To the soul of a perfume new and strange;
To the rapturous gleam—
To the music that comes in the song of the thrush
With a joyous thrill and a yearning hush.

A FRESH' ON THE MA'SH

By Dr. Charles C. Abbott

Author of "Travels in a Tree-Top," "The Birds About Us," etc.



A LONG the north wall of the smithy ran a low seat giving comfortable room for four people. It was far enough away to avoid the sparks from the anvil and, having a sunny, southern outlook, was the chosen spot where four old men of the village were wont to gather every bright winter day. Job Stillcreep was the dean of this little faculty, in whose keeping were the traditions of the neighborhood,—a long-settled one, yet never with sufficient vigor to outgrow the primitive conditions of its Colonial days.

The winter was drawing to a close, and the current topic of all was the signs of spring. As it usually happened, whatever was discussed, Job was not in agreement with his hearers. Whatever they suggested as surely indicative of the season's end he vigorously criticised, not that there was no basis for such a view, but because he had not hit upon it in advance of others. To-day it was another matter altogether, and one where agreement might be looked for, but Job was not even now in an acquiescent mood.

"I never know'd a higher fresh' on the ma'sh than this last one," remarked Benjamin Goodwheat, "an' it beats all creation where sech a lot o' water comes from."

"Then you didn't see the fresh' o' '41," replied Job. "I was nineteen that winter, and what with duckin' and mus'-rattin', didn't do much loafin'. The spring afore I follered fishin' above Perriwig Bar, but ol' man Biles was too contrary when the shad didn't run well, and sort o' laid it on us boys for not workin' the net right. I kicked an' we had it hot, an' a'ter a tongue-lashin' he gave me I got out. It wasn't what I wanted. His da'ter Nance drew me more'n the pay I was gettin' an' he know'd it; so he gave me to understand I needn't keep loafin' round. But I did see Nance more'n once, an' she didn't side with the ol' man. I kep' up heart an' worked on the farms 'round till fall came an' saved every penny I got. 'Long late in the summer I laid 'em out for a good gun an' fixin's an' turned to huntin'. Hides was a good price and Sammy Quicksall took all the ducks I shot at a fair figger. Things went on purty well till about Christmas, when I got restless-like for Nance and couldn't foller anythin' fur thinkin' o' her. You know how lads is when they get this way real bad, and that was me fur sure.

"I tho't it over, and says I, 'I'll go see the ol' man and make up if I can.' I went over from Duck Island to his house, but he seen me a-comin' and comes out, warnin'-like, and orders me off. He 'lowed he'd all his hands engaged. I said I was sorry, but up and square told him that wasn't what I came fur, but to keep steady comp'ny with Nance. Says I, 'I've a bit laid up, and can work steady as a farm hand all summer and foller gunnin' and trappin' fall and winter.' He wouldn't listen. I kep' a-jawin' and all the time edgin' towards the house. I seen Nance standin' in the door, lookin' sort o' smilin' like, and that kep' up my courage more'n the ol' man's gab kep' me down.

"Gettin' near enough, I says, 'Who do you favor, Nance?'

"She up and says, 'You, Job, 'cause you're fair and square and Daddy's no reason to go ag'in' you.'

"You never saw a madder man than ol' man Biles.

"'I ain't goin' ag'in' you, Daddy,' says Nance, 'but I can't help my favorin' Job. You know he's as good as any young feller 'round, and nobody's got nothin' ag'in' him.'

"I wanted to up and kiss the gal right there, but just held off a bit.

"'Get out o' here!' hollers the ol' man to me. 'Go in the house!' he hollers to Nance.

"'Not much,' says I. 'I'm in the public road jus' at present and committin' no breach o' the peace. But by the eternal racket,' says I, 'if you're rough with Nance in my hearin' there'll be trouble in the road or off o' it, as it happens where you be.'

"'I'll get a warrant out fur ye fur threatenin',' says the ol' man.

"Now, warrants is a nuisance. They're apt to interfere with your plans, so I sings out, 'Good-by, Nance!' and got out. She waves a bit o' ribbon and then said somethin' I didn't catch, but I 'lowed it was all sweet words, and so went away cheerful.

"It took me a couple o' weeks to get settled like. I couldn't plan nothin', seein' Nance was out o' reach. I'd a notion fur a house on the Island, but Nance might like one on the Manor shore. I got all upset, and says I, 'I'll see Nance, spite o' the ol' man.'

"That very day it started in a-rainin'. The wind got 'round to the s'uth'ard and snow and ice melted all in no time. Thinks I, 'There'll be a fresh.' Then I tho't o' Nance. The ol' man's house was too close to the river shore for safety, anyhow. More'n once the water had lapped over the front step, and in '39 it was on the first floor. There was no crossin' the river in a boat, so I went up to the bridge and walked down on the Manor side. The water kep' a-comin' up and up, and I know'd trouble was a-brewin' for the folks in the low lands. Talk about streaks o' luck! 'Fore I reached Biles's I seen a strange boat with oars in it comin' down stream lodged in some bresh. I know'd

it was from up the river, so I'd a right to take possession, an' you bet, I did. 'If,' says I, 'if the ol' man's ugly, I'm here to watch out for Nance, if he won't have 'sistance from me.' I had to wade to get the boat and was wet through, then and there, an' shakin' with cold, but that wasn't nothin'. 'It was all for Nance,' says I, and I work'd 'long the edge of the water like till I got to the big net-frame, and then I hollered.

"'Who be ye?' hollered the ol' man back.

"'Me, Job,' says I, and then Nance show'd at the winder. She was teary-like 'round the eyes, it sort o' seemed to me, tho', course, I couldn't see her real plain that far away.

"'Goin' to stay in there?' I hollered, not goin' up to the house.

"'You can give your help where it's wanted,' hollered the ol' man, and slammed the door.

"That there settled it for me. 'Ol' man or no ol' man, Nance ain't goin' to be drowned, if he means to be,' says I, and rowed up as near as I could get.

"'Don't you come no further,' hollers the ol' man.

"I didn't holler back, but pulls ashore and goes 'round the blind side o' the house. Nance know'd if she didn't a-see me, and luck had it ag'in, for the ol' man kep' his eye on the river. When I got back o' the house I made a motion to come out, and Nance opened a little winder and waved her hand. Wake snakes! but my heart giv' a thump, and I know'd then I was in for bizness. I crep' up along the garden fence and got real close. She saw and said, softy-like, she couldn't clim' thro', an' Daddy would ketch her if she opened the back door.

"'Ketch or no ketch,' says I, 'an' I'll tend to Daddy,' says I, and fust I know'd, she was out o' doors and I grabb'd her. 'Fore the ol' man saw she was in the boat, and thar he came a-hollerin'. You never saw a madder man than the ol' man was. He hollered 'Come back!' but she knew it was for her life she was runnin', an' we put out into the river.

"It was fool-work, sure enough, but I was only a fool of a chunk then, and tho't only o' Nance and nothin' o' nothin' else. A young feller in love, you know, ain't apt to be overburdened with common-sense. Fust I know'd we was in swifter water than I could tackle. The way we rushed 'long was a caution, an' all there was to do was to keep out o' the way o' logs and bresh-wood; but no use, a tree came quicker'n we were goin', an' we got fetched up in the branches. The tree took a roll like in a minute, and sort o' lifted the boat out o' the water, an' there we sat, ridin' in a way that was goin' faster'n pleasant. If the tree took another roll, we were goners, that was plain, an' I up an' says so.

"'Job,' says Nance, 'if it's God's will, so be it. If we can't live together, we can die together, an' that's better'n livin' apart."

"Didn't I feel queer-like! That woman sittin' there like one in a picter jus' made me grit me teeth, grip me oars, an' wait. I kep' one eye on the water and one on her, and 'fore I know'd it the tree giv' a lurch, an' the boat, 'stead o' upsettin', was free ag'in. Didn't I pull for the Jersey shore then, an' Nance didn't look like herself, but more'n ever like a picter. It was gettin' dark like, and the Borden-town lights begin to show out shiny. I pull'd till 'most my arms giv' out and then got into where it was easier rowin', but we was tangled up with rubbish in the mouth o' the creek an' there we stuck, movin' slowly out into the ma'sh. Logs, trees, housel-goods, sech a mess, an' all there was to do was to drift. Nance got sort' o' shiverin' but said nothin', but I heard her teeth chatterin' and I took off my coat and put it over her.

"She was cryin' like too, but I says nothin'. I seen a chance to get clear, I tho't, an' I pushed and poked with the oars and sort o' got out of the worst of it and a bit nearer the shore. Then I hollered. Folks had seen us. We was still out o' reach for a time, but gettin' nearer, and soon a feller flung a rope and, pullin' on it, we got near enough to step over logs and get ashore; but it wasn't easy. Nance was that weak she had to be held up like, and once down we went clean up to our necks. It was nip and tuck then, but a man got out to us and we carried Nance, a dead weight, to the shore at last. Women folks took her and I giv' out for once. I was nigh about as near gone as Nance was, but a swig o' rum sort o' sot me up, an' that was the last swig ever passed my mouth."

"Passed it outside?" asked Benjamin, interrupting Job for the first time.

"No, inside, an' here I be, eighty-one an' what the minister calls a livin' monniment to lettin' rum alone.

"As I was sayin', I was over the wust of it an' sot by the stove to dry off. But I did more'n that. I fell asleep an' slep' an' slep' till it was way on in the nex' day. When I woke I was lyin' on a settee by the stove, an' the fust I said was, 'How's Nance?'

"The men 'round said nothin' an' a woman was a-cryin'. Says I, 'What is it? You're boun' to tell me.' But they says, 'Keep still, Job, an' don't let her hear you.'

"Says I, 'Then she's livin', an' I sort o' fell asleep ag'in. But not for long. I heered a scream an' was on my pins in a second. I made for the room she was in, and sech a sight! She was white as a snow-bank an' wild-like 'round the eyes. Says I, 'Nance, be ye right ag'in?'

"She only says, 'Job,' and fell right back'ard. Then I got settled

like an' felt I was Job Stillcreep, sound and hearty. I never left Nance more'n a minute or two all that day, an' the Doctor said she was mendin', an' she did. Seein' me set her right, for she'd a notion I was drowned. It didn't take long to come 'round, an' we both were up an' ready to be doin', only she was baby-like and took hold o' cheers and tables sort o' when she moved around. We was in good hands, an' says I, 'Nance, now you're 'round ag'in, I'll go look up your Daddy.'

"She gives a jump at that an' up an' giv' me a smack I can hear the noise of yit. The women 'round sort o' laughed, an' Nance got red an' says, 'He's airnt it, if ever a man did.'

"'Them words is worth goin' it all over ag'in for,' says I, an' I went out with the fellers to see the sights. The water was down a good bit, an' I borrow'd a skiff an' was for goin' over to the ol' man's, but they said it was no use. His house was gone down the river an' no one had heard o' him. 'Keep it from Nance,' says I, an' I went just the same. It was a tough pull, but I got there. The ol' man was a-walkin' up an' down where the house used to be, an' when he seen me, about a hundred yards off, he stopped a bit and then up with a gun an' levelled it. I dropped into the boat as he blazed away, an' the shot rattled 'round but didn't hit me. I let the boat drift, peepin' over the gunnel. He loaded ag'in and fired, but I was too far off, an' then I seen two men a-runnin' an' they swung their arms 'round an' held him and drug him away. I went back, sort o' worried-like, an' up an' told Nance all about it.

"Says she, 'We'll go over there together,' says she, an' sech a look in her eyes I never seen afore. She wouldn't take no from no one.

"'Are you a-feared, Job?' says she.

"Says I, 'No,' an' we went. There was nobody 'bout when we got there, an' we didn't know rightly jus' where to go, but soon we saw the ol' man a-comin'. He'd slipped away from the folks as was a-keepin' an eye on him, an' Nance and me stood there together. He was gone clean daft. There was no look o' sense in his eyes, an' he wouldn't say nothin'.

"'Daddy,' says Nance, 'don't you know me?'

"'No,' says he, and then he looked wild at me, an' Nance begin a-cryin'.

"I hollered 'Help,' half-fearin' trouble, and the men came a'ter the ol' man a-runnin'.

"Says I, 'Go for the minister if he be in reachin',' an' they look'd at me, wonderin', but one of 'em went off. We four what was left stood there a-waitin', an' it seemed as if the day'd be gone 'fore t'other one come back, but he show'd up as the sun was a-settin' an' the minister with him.

" 'Be it you're willin', Nance and me'll get married,' says I. 'It's best for the ol' man an' us too, I'm thinkin'.'

" 'Really,' says the minister, 'but this is most unusual, and really I must—'

" I cut him short. 'This is no place for preachin', nor time neither. It's marryin' I'm in for, an' ask Nance if she's agreed to it.'

" The minister looked sort o' kerflummixt, but says he, stammerin' like, 'Miss Biles, is it your wish, under these remark'ble circumstances?'

" She up an' says 'Yes,' and lookin' at her daddy says, 'Daddy, don't you say so?'

" The ol' man didn't say nothin', but kep' a-lookin' sort o' wild like.

" 'I'll take care of 'em both,' says I, 'an' it might as well be here as anywhere, an' the sooner the better.' The long an' short of it is, the minister married me and Nance, with them two men to witness it, an' he giv' us his blessin' an' I giv' him a dollar. Then we stood there a minute, feelin' foolish like, I s'pose, not knowin' what to say, when the ol' man holler'd, nat'ral like, 'Nance, don't leave me!'

" Nance sprung on his neck like a cat on a sparrer an' most knocked him over.

" The light come back in the ol' man's eyes an' he shook like a leaf in the winter time. He held out his hand an' I took it, an' then, somehow, everythink look'd brighter, an' Nance cried an' laughed till I tho't she would go crazy. The ol' man cross'd the river with us an' we went to where me an' Nance had been stayin'.

" We soon got to work ag'in where the ol' man's house had stood, an' put up a bigger an' better one, an' did well that spring a-fishin', and then I settled down an' staid there till two year ago, when Nance 'crossed over,' as the minister said at the funeral, an' I'll soon foller an' hope I'll see her on t'other side. That was a fresh' on the ma'sh, in '41, sech as I never seen afore nor since."

THE GRASS

BY EDWARD WILBUR MASON

I AM the Grass, and though War hide the sun
To me at last shall foe and victor yield;
I claim all spoil for Peace: the latest field
Shall know my legions long as Marathon!

AN INVOLUNTARY BENE-FACTOR

By *Edith Robinson*

Author of "A Mock Caliph and His Wife," etc.



"YES, sir, they're the finest lot we've had in this season," repeated Mr. Burbank, noting with satisfaction his customer's unwonted warmth of approval. "I sent on the order as soon as you gave it, and 'twas lucky I did," he added. "The New York clubs and hotels take such a lot that my man said there wasn't another terrapin to be had for love or money in the Southern market. I'll send 'em up as soon as the things come in from the other stalls, sir."

Mr. Burbank himself had waited on his customer, and had taken especial care that the various items of the large order should be of the choicest; but Mr. Mason's satisfaction with the terrapin was so supreme as to leave comparatively little heed for whatever else was set before him; nor did he evidence any dissatisfaction on hearing the cost of the terrapin, although it was represented by three figures. Mr. Mason's Christmas Eve dinner was not to be a large one, but its guests were as carefully selected as its viands; even on a millionaire's table terrapin was not a dish to be set before an indiscriminate company. In the glow of prospective hospitality, Mr. Mason had nearly forgotten another order—of different sort and proportions than that to be sent to his own address. He gave it hastily. There was no need of nice consideration as to its various courses; he had sent the same Christmas dinner year after year to "Miss Thankful Mason, Bascombe." In prompt and grateful acknowledgment came the letter in the precise, old-fashioned handwriting. Mr. Mason considered his duty as nephew and correspondent fulfilled when he had glanced at the first line. He knew what followed—items concerning the poor of the village, various cases of illness, sundry petty misfortunes that had befallen village folk with whose personalities Aunt Thankful always assumed him to be familiar. Then letter always ended with the hope that another year he would be able to eat his Christmas dinner with her.

He had taken many dinners with Aunt Thankful, when the marshes and creeks about Bascombe had offered irresistible attractions for shooting and fishing to a boy of fifteen. He remembered that there were always dry shoes and stockings in readiness before the kitchen fire

after one of those long tramps over the marshes, and that, no matter how late the hour in the primitive village order, the spotless little tea-table was always in readiness for two. No terrapin of later years had such savory recollections as Aunt Thankful's clam chowder on these occasions. He recalled with some amusement her anxious look as he passed his plate for a fourth helping, and the resigned sigh with which she evidently left results to a boy's digestion. His mother had always wondered at Archie's fondness for spending his vacations in what, with unusual vigor of language, she termed "that God-forsaken place." Aunt Thankful never visited the luxurious city mansion, though her fondness for Archie the boy was an inheritance of that which she had felt for Archie the elder, her brother's son, whom she had brought up till the lad found the opportunities of the little fishing hamlet insufficient scope for his energy and abilities, that soon worked their way out of the world in which the struggle for mere existence holds full sway to that which controls many of the forces of that struggle. When Archibald Mason the second reached manhood, it was to step into a position in the world of industry and finance in which his name was speedily to become an acknowledged power.

The particular manœuvre of which Mr. Mason was just then one of the prime movers was one that involved industrial conditions all over the country, threatening the poor with suffering through the coming months for which no adequate means of relief seemed possible. Although not one of the men whose vast wealth made their names synonymous to the outside world with the great "Trust" whose manipulations were just then filling the columns of the newspapers, it was well understood in the inner circles that Archibald Mason was the "brains" of the latest "combination." At the dinner on Christmas Eve, when the president of the trust and certain other capitalists were to be present, the question was to be settled how another turn of the screw could be taken that would inevitably bring the opposing forces to the terms of the operators—unconditional surrender. The "brains" of the trust went on his way to his office in pleasing security that he and his confrères were in a position to dictate terms. The "masses" had no rights that capitalists were bound to respect.

The following morning, as Mr. Mason was drawing on his gloves, his housekeeper appeared with a disturbed face.

"If you please, sir," she said, "I'm thinking there must be some mistake. The terrapin and other things haven't come. The market-man has just brought a chicken and some celery and other little fixings."

"What—how's that?" questioned Mr. Mason sharply.

"I don't know, sir," answered the housekeeper in distressed tones.

"I wasn't in the kitchen when the man came, and the cook didn't think to look into the basket till he'd gone."

To the ever-alert brain of the capitalist it was evident that the basket that had come was that intended for Aunt Thankful. A premonition of the sequence of that blunder was in Mr. Mason's mind as he flung his gloves on the breakfast-table and went to the telephone. There was consternation at the other end of the line ere the final answer came in Mr. Burbank's voice:

"Can't understand how it happened, sir. The terrapin and the rest have gone to Miss Thankful Mason's, Bascombe. What's her telephone number?"

A telephone in the little house on the marshes would have been as great a phenomenon as the roc's egg. The suggestion completed the measure of Mr. Mason's wrath. When he would have resumed communication with the market, "Central" had apparently vanished, and when he succeeded at last in getting the line again, Mr. Burbank's voice was dissolved into a whirring and buzzing. At length came the words, "Send a man, sir."

The "brains" of the trust, brought to bear upon a domestic exigency, worked with the same comprehensive rapidity that was making the industrial forces of the world stand still awaiting his dictum. To telegraph for the terrapin was out of the question. From past experience he knew that the telegram would merely remain in the station, several miles from the village, till some obliging neighbor was going Miss Thankful Mason's way. To send a messenger was scarcely less futile; there would be no time to perform the errand and get back to the station in time for the only return train. On the hither side of Bascombe was a flag station, placed for the convenience of a life-saving station on the coast. If Mr. Mason went himself, by stopping the train at this point he could take the short cut over the familiar marshes, reach Aunt Thankful's house, and get back to the flag station in time for the return train. He could be back in town by early afternoon. In the stagnation of business attending the "tie-up" it was of no great importance that he should not be at his office that morning. Besides, not only was his own gastronomic soul stirred to its depths at the threatened disappointment, but he had depended on the terrapin as a potent factor in persuading the president concerning certain debated points, of which the president was taking a view too lenient towards the "masses."

A message to his office, a call for a cab, and Mr. Mason was speeding towards the station. On his way thither he noted with some annoyance that he had left his heavy furred gloves on the breakfast-table. Not all the luxuries of modern heating apparatus could spare Mr. Mason what he thought was suffering from cold hands. As he had

calculated, there was just time to catch the train. There was no parlor-car—an item in itself of some discomfort to a person accustomed to special accommodations. It was a car apparently rescued from the junk-yard, with draughty windows, warmed by an old-fashioned stove, the ill-jointed pipe of which and a general look of rusty incapacity gave scant promise of comfort upon a winter journey. The other passengers consisted of a woman and child, apparently, from the little girl's talk, going home to spend Christmas with "grandma," and two men: one, Mr. Mason's quick, comprehensive glance decided, was a "drummer," possibly, for some city hardware firm; the other was evidently a seafaring man, judging from his general appearance and especially from the boots that had probably not left his legs during a protracted voyage. A little hamlet amongst the sea-marshes had small attraction to offer, and even in the tide of summer travel railroad accommodations were poor. Mr. Mason had papers with him, with which he proceeded to busy himself. Thus occupied, he did not notice a few scattered flakes of snow that, scarcely distinguishable from the swirling clouds of dust, were blown against the windows by a nipping little wind that had apparently been lying in wait for the train in the open country.

Suddenly a violent rattling of the windows, a darkness as of twilight,—though it was not yet noon,—caused Mr. Mason to stretch out his hand mechanically for the electric light on his office desk. His knuckles came into violent contact with the back of the next seat and aroused him to a realization of his surroundings. The train had reached the region of sand-dunes and wide stretches of sea-marsh. He could scarcely see the arid landscape for the gusts of blinding snow that seemed to be coming from all directions at once. His hands were so benumbed that they could scarcely hold the paper.

"Can't you give us more heat?" he demanded, in the tones of crisp authority to which he was accustomed, as the conductor entered the car.

"Stove's red hot now, sir," answered the man, shovelling in more coal and trying to increase the draught. As Mr. Mason took a seat nearer the end of the car he noticed that on the mist on the window panes were shooting fine, long needles; with almost miraculous swiftness a thick frost-work had formed itself.

"What's the meaning of this cold?" he demanded testily.

"Don't know as I'm to blame for it," returned the conductor in an aggrieved tone. "It looks like a blizzard."

Mr. Mason glanced at his watch.

"We should be near Bascombe," he said.

"We aren't half way there," rejoined the man. "We've been slow-

ing up for the last hour. Snow's piling on the track and the wind is howling from every direction at once."

"Turn back. I must be in town this afternoon," urged Mr. Mason with growing uneasiness.

"'Twouldn't be no use. It's as bad one way as another," responded the conductor. "We're off Judson's Point, and if you know anything about this part of the coast, you know it's the place where all the winds of the Atlantic meet and howl."

He left the car, and Mr. Mason spent a few futile moments in inward fuming over the situation. The afternoon should have found him on hand to watch various possible moves of the opposing forces. Must to-night's dinner-party be without a host, the last move of the game played without the master hand that had brought it to its present consummation? He rang the bell twice, thrice, ere the furious peal brought response. As the conductor reopened the door it was torn from his grasp and an icy blast swept through the car, striking its inmates almost as with physical force. The three men flung themselves upon the door and by the exertion of all their strength succeeded in closing it. Mr. Mason's fingers were aching bitterly.

"We're miles from a station," answered the conductor surlily as Mr. Mason urged his need of wiring. "Tim and I tried to walk along the track to telegraph for another engine, but nothing can stand against this wind. It's a regular howling blizzard, and if we get through by this time to-morrow, we're in luck."

"But I must get these through." Mr. Mason held up several pages of his note-book with cipher despatches thereon.

"'Tain't no use," returned the conductor. "The wires are down."

The train, that had been moving for some time at scarce the rate of an active man's pace, after an interval of stopping and spasmodic attempts to move on again came to a standstill. Presently there appeared the three other train hands, with hair and beards encrusted with snow and ice and the look of men well-nigh exhausted with battling with the elements.

"Do you mean to say we're stalled here till the storm is over?" demanded Mr. Mason in dismay.

"That's about the size of it," answered the engineer. "There's no travel to speak of on this line and it's not likely they'll pay us much attention till some of the other roads are dug out. We sha'n't freeze,—there's enough coal to keep the stove going for a week,—but there's nothing to eat aboard and 'tain't a very lively outlook that we'll have any Christmas dinner," he added grimly.

The little girl began to cry softly, partly from the strangeness of the situation, partly from the disappointment of not being at "grand-ma's" on Christmas. The woman coughed painfully.

"I'm just getting over the grip," she said with an apologetic air as Mr. Mason glanced at her and the child with involuntary annoyance. Trivial noises rasped to the limit of endurance nerves hardened to the incessant roar of a great city.

The sailor took off his coat, soiled and torn and redolent of tobacco and strange sea smells, and with almost womanly tenderness wrapped it about the shivering form of the little girl. Mr. Mason noted that the fingers of the man's right hand were lacking.

"Left 'em up Behring way," was the answer to the engineer's interrogation as the latter, despite a feeble demurrer, wrapped his own coat about the woman.

The train men, aided by the sailor and drummer,—Mr. Mason looking helplessly on the while,—made a sort of pent-house at the end of the car by piling the seats together; the cushions, banked against the windows, perhaps kept out some measure of the cold, but ere long the violence of the blast had broken some of the other window-panes and the snow whirled about the feet of the little party in the rude shelter. The men brought in sufficient coal from the tender to last through the night. As darkness fell—long ere sunset—the only light within the car was that afforded by a lantern and the red-hot stove, that scarcely radiated heat two feet from its circumference. The temperature had fallen to near freezing-point.

"I guess we aren't the only ones who won't have much of a Christmas jollification," said the engineer. "If the strike ain't over soon, the Lord knows how poor folks will get enough to eat or keep warm this winter."

"Maybe if them that's causing it were shut up in a blizzard for twenty-four hours, they'd come out with a few new ideas," suggested the drummer.

Mr. Mason knew the talk—that drifted on in this strain for some minutes—had no personal application. His labelled likeness, though of frequent publication, bore no more resemblance to his actual features than did those of most newspaper photographs. Nevertheless, a curious new sensation, neither that of cold or hunger, began to make itself felt as he listened to details of an existence of which he had never before come into actual contact. The apparently self-evident fact that "the masses" consist of individuals with nervous systems and digestive organs was one that required time to assimilate.

"Back from a two-years' cruise in the Arctics, with thirty-four cents for myself and wife to live on through the winter," the sailor was saying.

"Were you wrecked?" asked the conductor.

"No. We went on shares and luck was against us. The old man was stubborn and wouldn't go home till we stayed up north too long

and got froze in with nothing to eat in sight. We pulled through somehow,—Lord knows how,—but most of us left fingers or toes or a leg or arm in the ice-pack. I tried for a berth in town. But there's no room even for men with their right hands whole and sound. The old man paid my fare home."

In similar vein the talk drifted on. By and by the little group about the fire grew silent. The other men were chewing tobacco—they had offered of their store to Mr. Mason, but he eschewed tobacco in any form. As the night wore on, the biting cold seemed to be concentrated in his fingers, but of any discomfort from lack of food he was unconscious, save that of a great sinking and weariness. Every now and then the voices about the fire would begin again, but they seemed to come from a great way off, and Mr. Mason could not clearly distinguish the words, other than that they were of cold and hunger. Were there no other facts in the world save cold and hunger? thought the irritated "brains" of the trust. Once in a while he was momentarily aroused from his growing torpor by the banging of the stove-door. How many hours passed thus he could not have told.

He was aroused at last from a blissful condition in which all sensation of discomfort, whether physical or mental, had vanished by a rude hand upon his shoulder.

"Wake up," said a commanding voice.

In vain he endeavored to shake off the grip.

"Let me sleep," he muttered thickly.

Somewhere out of the icy mist came other words, other voices:

"Not if we know it! Here, lend a hand. When they look like that, it's going to be a fight. Who'd ha' thought he'd ha' given out before the woman and the kid?"

But nerves strained every day to their utmost tension without snapping were not proof against this unwonted physical attack.

Mr. Mason's other shoulder was in another iron grip and, despite his attempted protestations, he was made to walk, to run up and down the car, till his captors were themselves apparently weary. As in a vague nightmare, he was conscious of such cold and hunger as he had never imagined—cold that seemed concentrated to agony in his fingertips, hunger that nothing could allay but terrapin. There followed a time when even these vague sensations vanished and he seemed to be in the vast void of the stellar regions, sinking through space. And upon him was some unimaginable horror of having to answer for all the cold and hunger in the world.

"If we don't get it down him, he's a goner," said a voice close at hand.

Something hot and reviving was being poured down his throat, a vigorous friction, accompanied by the smell of burnt woollen, was

sending life into his limbs. Slowly Mr. Mason struggled to a sense of the situation. The odor of boiling tea was diffused through the pent-house, and food—bread and canned meat—was at hand. Someone was feeding him with small morsels.

By and by he perceived that it was daylight and that the storm had in some measure abated.

"You ain't just the man to go on a cruise north. You'd leave more than your right hand behind," suggested the sailor when Mr. Mason had struggled to his senses.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"Same place," returned the sailor. "I saw 'twas up with you if you didn't have some hot tea down you before daylight, and I made out to get to the life-saving station. 'Twa'n't so bad going, as the wind was at my back, but getting back—whew!"

"How far was it?" queried Mr. Mason faintly.

"Matter of five miles or so."

"You undertook that frightful journey to save my life?" asked the "brains" of the trust wonderingly.

"'Twa'n't nothin' else to do, far as I see. You wouldn't let a man die, would you, when you might stretch out a hand to save him?" answered the sailor in equal bewilderment.

Mr. Mason experienced another novel sensation. He was esteemed an honorable man in the ethics of the business world. But there were motives that had no part in the code of "the Street."

None of the other members of the little party, despite the suffering of the night, had come near the collapse that had threatened Mr. Mason. It was afternoon when the train reached Bascombe. Mr. Mason wrote a few words on a leaf torn from his notebook and handed it with his address card to the sailor.

"Come there when you want work," he said briefly.

The station-master had a team that would take him to Miss Thankful Mason's house.

The sailor was still staring at the slip of paper when the drummer approached.

"The night was too much for him!" nodded the sailor towards Mr. Mason's departing form.

"I reckon it's all right," returned the drummer, after a moment's astonished inspection of the paper—a check for a thousand dollars. Archibald Mason's name is good for more millions than you or I will ever have thousands!"

Aunt Thankful herself opened the door in response to Mr. Mason's knock. To a brief stupefaction succeeded such rejoicing as was evidenced in shining eyes and a beaming smile, for all she said was,—

"Why, Archie!" but the sound of his boyhood's name was oddly pleasant to the man in whose ears it had been unspoken for years.

"You are giving a dinner?" he queried, for Aunt Thankful was arrayed in her best black silk gown and the little parlor—never opened save on state occasions—was filled to overflowing with guests, while from beyond came unmistakable odors of a Christmas feast.

"I guess we'd better call it your dinner-party, Archie," responded his aunt seriously. "But land, what am I thinking of, keeping you here, and you cold and wet! Come right into the kitchen and get dry."

Mr. Mason, with a pleasant, well-nigh forgotten sense of being cared for, was made to stretch his feet before the fire, while dry stockings and slippers were unearthed from bygone stores. As he made pretence of drinking a stinging bowl of "composition," Aunt Thankful, her skirts pinned up and protected by a big blue-and-white check apron, gave the final touches to the various dishes with which stove, table, and even the chairs were piled. With grudging amusement, not unmingled with dismay, Mr. Mason recognized what was to have formed the courses of his own elaborate Christmas Eve dinner. He wondered in which of the covered dishes were the terrapin, and how Aunt Thankful had been able to cook that—to her—unknown dainty. Well, it was too late to rectify the mistake, and the good soul was finding such satisfaction in her own unwonted opportunity for hospitality that it was better to suffer her to remain in her error.

Besides, the sense of bodily comfort that was stealing over him after the suffering of the past thirty hours, the generosity with which he was credited, were so gratifying to both body and soul that he found himself more and more inclined to accept the role of benefactor so unexpectedly thrust upon him.

But where were the terrapin?

"I trust everything arrived in good condition?" he inquired tentatively.

"Everything was just beautiful!" beamed Aunt Thankful, coming nearer the fire and clasping her hands together in almost childish exuberance of satisfaction. "I told Elmiry Bangs that I guessed you knew what a real old-fashioned Christmas dinner ought to be: turkey at the head of the table, ducks at the other end, and them little birds and fish and oysters down the middle."

And the terrapin—to what part of the board was assigned the terrapin for which he had suffered so much? Delicacy restrained him from pressing the question. In the commingled odors of the Christmas feast he could not distinguish that of the costly viand.

"Every year I've asked some of the folks who weren't going to have much of a set-out to come here for their Christmas dinner," Aunt

Thankful went on. "It was real good of you, Archie, to send, always, the chicken and fixin's. But I think there's nothing better than salt cod if you know how to cook it just right, and I'd rather have it than chicken any day myself, particularly when I knew Jane Dyer's boy was just pindlin' for good, hot, strong chicken broth, and that Elmiry Bangs had had nothing but clams to eat for two months. I know 'tain't right for folks to be always thinking of their stomachs," continued Aunt Thankful seriously, "but I do think that meat victuals is good for anybody once in a while. This year folks have been too awful poor to even think of Christmas, long of them men who do seem to want the world for themselves; and there's been so much sickness about that even the folks who had a little money laid up didn't dare spend it, because everybody said the winter would be an awful hard one.

"One night I lay awake thinking—and, I'm ashamed to say, worrying, as though running the universe was my business—when all at once it come over me, 'Thankful Mason, where's your faith? Has the Lord ever failed to provide your Christmas dinner? When He fed the five thousand with the loaves and fishes, do you think He can't feed twenty with one chicken and fixin's?' That was the number I'd make out weren't likely to have any Christmas dinner—more likely, no dinner at all," explained Aunt Thankful. "So I just made up my mind I'd trust Him, and after that I turned over and went to sleep like a child. The first thing the next morning I put on my coat and bonnet and went out to invite twenty folks to my Christmas dinner.

"I'm not a-saying, Archie, but what I'm a poor, weak creature, undeserving the Lord's goodness, for every once in a while I'd find my heart kind of sink, though I kept a-saying to myself all the time:

"'The Lord will provide. The Lord *will* provide!'

"When I got home and found the kitchen just piled up with the things you'd sent, I went down on my knees and asked the Lord to forgive me—yes, Archie, forgive. For then I knew that 'twasn't the Lord I'd been trusting, it was you, Archie, your kindness and generosity, when you knew what hard times the poor folks were having as I'd always written you about. I knew you'd remember how the Lord had prospered you and would want to share your blessings with your neighbors." The trembling old hands were placed gently on the man's head. And again Archibald Mason felt that some chord had been touched whose vibrations were awakening new, strange emotions within him.

"I sorter mistrusted you meant to come yourself, so I told the folks we'd have to have dinner a mite late. I hope five-o'clock dinner ain't going to set bad on your stomach," added Aunt Thankful, with something of the same apprehension she had displayed when the boy Archie passed his plate for a fourth helping of clam chowder.

Midway of the feast, as dish after dish disappeared before the ravenous appetites of the guests and there was still no trace of what was to have been the chief dainty of the Christmas Eve dinner, Mr. Mason could contain himself no longer, and took occasion to whisper to his hostess the question that had been hovering on his lips the past hour.

"The—what—terrapin?" repeated Aunt Thankful blankly. "Oh, yes, them little mud-turtles. I know you won't mind, Archie," she beamed over her spectacles, "but they did look so kind of black and nasty that I couldn't bear to tech 'em. So I give 'em to Elmiry Bangs's yaller dog."

Two days later the newsboys were calling:

"End of the strike! Mason will arbitrate!"

UNSAID

BY EDMUND VANCE COOKE

HIS mother was combing her sombre hair
Near the baby's bed in the corner there,
Which it seemed to us that we could not spare
When his little life left us. So we kept
The wee, white nest where he always slept,
Where the little one always slept.

In the mesh of her hair the smooth comb tripped,
And clattering down to the floor it slipped;
For the flash of a second we forgot,
And, startling, turned to the little cot
To see—but the baby heard it not,
The baby heard it not.

Deep in the eyes of the other, each
Sounded the sorrow too deep for speech;
Into each other's hearts we read;
Down to my shoulder I drew her head
And left the pitiful words unsaid,
The pitiful words unsaid.

NEXT SUMMER'S GARDEN

By *Eben E. Rexford*

Author of "Home Floriculture," etc.



THE amateur gardener is often at a loss as to what flowers to select for her garden. She would like kinds which give the greatest amount of bloom throughout the season and which require the least possible amount of care. The woman who is in this quandary will do well to remember that years of trial have proved the superior merits of what may be called the "old-fashioned flowers," and it will be wise for her to select from them, for the most part, the garden she is planning for the coming summer. These flowers will never disappoint; they do not ask for constant care; they give rich returns for all the attention expended on them; and—anyone can grow them.

I am so often asked to give a list of a dozen kinds of annuals which I consider best adapted to culture in the ordinary garden that it may not be amiss to give it here. It is: Aster, Petunia, Phlox Drummondii, Calliopsis, Nasturtium, Sweet Pea, Morning-Glory, Verbena, Scabiosa, Balsam, Ten-Week Stock, and Marigold. For the benefit of those who may like more variety, or have a large garden to fill, I will add a supplementary list of another dozen of very desirable kinds: Candytuft, Sweet Alyssum, Salpiglossis, Celosia, Portulaca, Snapdragon, Eschscholtzia, Zinnia, Dianthus, Nicotiana, Salvia, and Centaurea. These two dozens do not exhaust the list of really good plants by any means, but they include the best of the kinds which the average amateur will find it advisable to undertake the cultivation of.

Right here let me offer this advice: Do not let the enthusiasm of the spring season get the control of your good judgment and tempt you into undertaking more than you feel sure of your ability to carry out satisfactorily. Bear in mind the fact that a good garden represents a considerable amount of hard work, also that a neglected garden is one of the sorriest sights imaginable, and do not make the mistake of beginning what you will not be likely to complete. A few flowers, well grown, will afford a hundred-fold more satisfaction than a large number of inferior ones. It is much better to concentrate your attention than to scatter it over so wide a field that justice cannot be done to the occupants of it.

I am well aware that the impression prevails among many amateur gardeners that by sowing seed early in the season, in the house, it is

possible to secure a much earlier crop of flowers than can be obtained from plants grown wholly in the garden. The theory of this belief is good, but the test of it will convince anyone that there is a wide difference between the theory and the successful practice of it. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred plants grown from early-sown seed will die before the time comes when it is safe to put them out-of-doors, and the one possible exception will be so lacking in vitality that plants from seed sown in the garden after the weather becomes warm will get ahead of it, if it happen to survive the ordeal of the change from the house to the ground, which it seldom will. In our overheated living-rooms, with their fluctuating temperatures, it is almost an impossibility to grow good plants of any kind, and especially seedlings. They are too delicate to withstand the difficulties to which they are subjected. The professional florist succeeds with his seedlings because he has all conditions necessary to success under control. This is not possible in the living-room, hence our failure in our attempts to grow plants from seed there. This being the case, our efforts to "get the start of the season" with early-sown plants are quite certain to prove abortive, and I would not encourage the amateur to undertake this phase of gardening. If seed is sown in the garden when the soil is warm, and the weather has become settled, we will get flowers quite as early as we need them. The spring-flowering plants and shrubs will hardly have completed their blossoming-season before the earliest of the annuals will begin to bloom. Therefore we can well afford to wait for the annuals.

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The first thing to be done in garden-work is the spading of the beds. Do this about the first of May at the North. Throw up the soil in clods, and let it lie as it falls from the spade for three or four days, exposed to the action of air and sun and possible showers. By the end of that time a good deal of moisture will have drained and evaporated from it, and it will be in a condition to pulverize easily. Work it over until it becomes fine and mellow. This is important, for the delicate roots of seedling plants will find it difficult to make their way in a coarse, hard soil. Also, fertilize it well. This is another item of great importance, for in order to secure a vigorous development we must feed our plants well. Those living in the country, where barnyard manure is easily procurable, will doubtless depend on this as a fertilizer,—and, indeed, there is nothing superior to it in nutritive value,—but there is one serious objection to its use, and that is the certainty with which weeds are introduced into the garden by it. There will be all the weed-pulling one cares to do under the most favorable circumstances, and barnyard manure will add vastly to the crop. I have for some years past depended on commercial fertilizers in the flower-garden, and I am

well satisfied with the result. By their use I get fine plants and no weeds. I do not mean that the person who uses these fertilizers will not have weeds to fight, but there will be only those which come from seed in the soil. The gardener who lives in city or village will find these fertilizers on sale at very reasonable rates at all places where agricultural articles are sold. They can be varied to suit the peculiarities of the soil in different localities. The dealer of whom you purchase will be able to tell you what kind will be likely to prove most effective with you if you give him an idea of the kind of soil you intend to use it on. He will also be able to advise the proportion in which it should be used. These matters I cannot give definite advice about, because soils vary to such an extent in kind and quality that what would apply in one place might not be the proper kind to use a few miles away.

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Seed-sowing is a delicate operation and must be done carefully, or there will be sorry failures. The seed of many kinds of plants is so fine that it will fail to germinate if covered deeply,—in fact, it does not require any covering. In sowing Petunias, Portulacas, and others of that class I would scatter the seed *on the soil*,—which should, of course, be as mellow as possible before entrusting seed to it,—and then go over the bed with a smooth board and press the soil down firmly. This forces the seed into the earth, and makes the soil so compact that it will retain all the moisture necessary to bring about germination. Larger seed can be covered lightly by sifting fine soil over it, after which the pressing-board should be used. If you want the seed you use to grow, never bury it at the bottom of a furrow, after the manner of the market-gardener. The seed of his plants is quite unlike that which you make use of in the flower-garden, and can stand a treatment which the other cannot.

I have made a practice of late years of sowing flower-seed in small beds, rather than in the large beds where my plants are to grow in summer. I find that this saves a good deal of work, because it can be concentrated on the bit of ground given up to the production of seedlings. Here I grow them until they are large enough to transplant.

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Transplanting should be done, if possible, on a cloudy or showery day. This is work that must be done carefully, for young plants are tender things, and a little rough handling means death to them. I use a stick a little larger than a pencil to make a place in which to set the young plants. This I insert in the bed to the depth of an inch or an inch and a half, according to the length of the root of the plant I am working with. Having made a number of holes, I lift my seedlings from the bed in which I have started them, being careful to

disturb their roots as little as possible, and, taking one lightly between the thumb and finger of the left hand, I drop its roots into the hole made for it, but do not let go of it. With the right hand I press the soil firmly, but gently, about the suspended roots. When a row is filled with plants I water them, using for this purpose a pot having a spout that does not throw a large stream, for not a great deal of water is needed by each plant. If a large stream is turned upon them, there is danger of washing them out or loosening them. Just enough water should be used to saturate the soil about the plant and settle it about its roots. Then I arrange some sort of shade for them. It is never safe to trust to cloudy weather in transplanting. The sun may assert itself suddenly, and in a few minutes the newly-set plants will be wilted. Always provide some means of averting this danger. I make a sort of cone of thick paper, run a sharpened stick out and in through one side of it to support it, and insert the other end of the stick in the ground alongside the plant I desire to shade. This keeps the sun away as effectively as a little umbrella would, and as it does not touch the ground, the air has a chance to circulate freely about the plant. Such a protection I find vastly preferable to shingles or pieces of board set between the plants and the sun, as the sun will shift, while this protection will not, and your plants may be exposed and as much injury be done thereby as would have resulted from the entire absence of protection. Keep your plants shaded, and shaded completely, until they begin to grow.

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Weeding should begin as soon as there are weeds to pull. Do not let them get the start of you. If you do, you will find it a difficult matter to get the start of them. They are aggressive, and they mean always to take possession of the garden if it is possible for them to do so. But give them to understand that you will not allow this by waging war on them early in the season and showing them no quarter. Those growing close to your flowering plants will have to be pulled up carefully to avoid loosening the roots of the others, but those between the rows can be kept down by the hoe, which should be used daily. If there are not many weeds for it to cut down, the loosening which the use of it will give the soil will be of great benefit to your plants, especially if the season happen to be a dry one. I find that many persons fear to stir the soil of the flower-garden in a dry period, thinking that they will add to the harmful effects of the drought by so doing. In this they are mistaken. If the surface of the soil is allowed to crust over, as it will in a "dry spell," it can absorb no moisture from dews and slight showers. But if we keep the soil loose and open by frequent stirring, it acts like a sponge and absorbs whatever moisture there may be in the atmosphere. Therefore do not be afraid to use the hoe freely in dry weather.

If watering is necessary, do it after sundown, when evaporation takes place more slowly than during the day. And do not apply it through a sprinkling-nozzle. This scatters it all over the soil and does superficial work, because not enough water falls about the roots of the plants, where it is most needed. Use a pot having a long spout, which will make it an easy matter for you to put the water where it belongs. If you begin to water your plants, you must keep on doing it as long as the dry period lasts.

The arrangement of plants in the garden is a matter which ought to be carefully considered before beds are made for them. It is easy to spoil the effect we have in mind, when we think of the garden in its prime, by so locating our plants that they interfere with one another both in regard to size and color. We may put large plants in the foreground, where they will hide others of lower growth, and we may so arrange colors that they give a most discordant effect. These mistakes, however, can easily be avoided if we are willing to study the catalogues of the florists before we locate our plants in the garden. Know the height of each plant you use, and so place it that it will show to the best possible advantage. In this way you can secure a graduated effect—the tall-growing kinds forming a background for the lower growers, and the dwarf kinds occupying a place at the front where their charms will not be hidden. We give too little thought to arranging our plants effectively, and the result is very unsatisfactory. Give this part of garden-work a good deal of careful study, and you will be surprised at the improvement resulting from it.

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The haphazard use of colors ought always to be guarded against. I have seen gardens spoiled by unfortunate color-combinations. It is just as easy to prevent this as it is to avoid the mistake of putting plants of different sizes where they do not belong. Study up on the color-question, and so arrange your colors that there will be harmony instead of discord. In order to do this most effectively, I would advise you to make a diagram of your garden before you begin work in it, and mark down in each bed the name and color of the plant it is to be filled with. This will greatly simplify matters, you will find, when the hurry of garden work is here, and it will do away with the mistakes you will quite likely make if you go to work without some definite plan to work to.

I am not a great admirer of "carpet-bedding," but I am fond of arranging my plants so that color-contrast is secured. It is an easy matter to make a most attractive circular bed by planting white, rose, and pale-yellow Phlox in rows. These colors harmonize charmingly, and the contrast between them heightens the beauty of each. The

pleasing effect of such a bed is increased if we use as a border the Madame Salleroi Geranium, with its pale-green and creamy-white foliage. This harmonizes perfectly with the Phlox, and is extremely attractive in itself. I consider it our very best plant for edging. It forms a rounded, compact mass of foliage, requires absolutely no training, and is attractive throughout the season. Those having old plants of it which they have carried through the winter can break them apart and plant each piece in the beds where they are to grow in May, setting them about eight inches apart. Not one in twenty will fail to grow. By the end of June they will have grown to such a size that they meet in the row, and from that time to the coming of frost they will be quite as attractive as the flowering plants they are used with.

If a brilliant bed is desired, use scarlet *Salvia* in the centre, with *Calliopsis* surrounding it. Do not depend on one row of the latter, but use plants enough to make a broad mass. White Candytuft or Sweet Alyssum would make an effective edging for such a bed.

Eschscholtzia, massed, makes a most gorgeous showing. It is one of our best yellow flowers, and will be found very effective in combination with the scarlet or crimson of *Salvia* or *Phlox*.

I would never advise the use of seed in which the various colors are mixed. With it you are likely to get some most inharmonious results. A bed of *Phlox* from "mixed" seed will probably give you pink, scarlet, lilac, and mauve colors, and the effect of these in combination will be positively painful to the sensitive eye. Such discords cannot be avoided unless you use seed in which each color is by itself. The expense may be a little more, but the result will be so satisfactory that you will think the extra money well invested.



We have some plants which we neglect too much. One of these is the *Amaranthus*. It is not particularly pretty on close inspection, but when seen from a little distance it is extremely attractive when grown in masses. A circular bed of it in full bloom, its rich, dull red surrounded by the orange-yellow of the *Calliopsis*, will be sure to attract attention and challenge admiration. Its foliage is quite as attractive as its flowers, being of the same rich color. For rich its color is, though it may seem dull when compared with other reds.

A most pleasing "tropical" effect can be secured by using *Ricinus* in groups, either by itself or in combination with such plants as *Cannas* or *Caladiums*. It grows to a height of eight to ten feet, with immense palmate foliage of bronze-green overlaid with coppery lustre. For back rows it is unsurpassed. It is easily grown from seed.

No garden can afford to be without Dahlias. They are magnificent as to color, profuse as to bloom, and especially valuable because of

their habit of late flowering. To grow them well, give them a very rich soil and plenty of water. It is not necessary, as many suppose, to start them early. The secret of success with them consists in giving them a good start at planting-time and keeping them going steadily ahead. Last season I planted my Dahlias the last of May, and had flowers from them in July. But I made the soil in which I planted them so rich that they could not stop growing had they been inclined to. It will be necessary to provide stout stakes for the support of these plants, as their stalks are brittle and easily broken.

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The Gladiolus is another flower which ought to be in every garden. It is of the easiest possible culture. Give it a rich and mellow soil, plant it four or five inches below the surface, about the tenth of May, and keep weeds from crowding it, and it will ask for no more attention from you. Its range of colors is wonderful. A bed of it will make your garden magnificent. It combines the rich coloring of the Orchid with the delicacy in tone and texture of the Lily. Unlike many brilliantly colored flowers, it is never coarse. It is most effective when planted in groups of from twelve to twenty. The long, slender flower-stalks will need some support to prevent their being broken down by sudden winds. I would not advise staking and tying them, as that always results in a stiff, formal effect far from pleasing. I make use of a large barrel-hoop, across which I stretch coarse twine, such as is used for tying up wool or on harvesting machines, in such a manner as to secure a large number of meshes. I use this twine because it presents a larger surface to the stalks than small twine, thus doing away with the danger of cutting into the tender growth. I support the hoop on three stakes, having it about eighteen inches from the ground. It will be necessary to assist the stalks in finding their way through the meshes. If painted a dark green, this support will not be unpleasantly obtrusive.

◆

And every garden ought to include a bed of Tea Roses. Say what they may about the beauty of other flowers, there is not one of them that rivals the Rose, and no other plant that we can grow will afford us the satisfaction that this will. Small plants of the ever-blooming varieties—this includes the Teas, the Bengal, and the Noisette sections—will come into bloom by midsummer and continue to give us flowers until cold weather if given proper treatment. This consists in planting them in a very rich soil—for the Rose is fond of hearty food and a good deal of it—and a system of cutting-back after each crop of flowers that new branches may be sent out, on which flowers will be borne. This is important, because the flowers are only produced on the new growth, and any method of culture which fails to provide such

growth will prove unsatisfactory. By making and keeping the soil rich we encourage the plants to constant effort in the way of growth, and our reward comes in the shape of large, richly colored, and delightfully fragrant flowers, any one of which is worth a score of ordinary blossoms. Young plants cost but little. By all means invest in a dozen or two of these Roses.

Nothing was said about Pansies in the lists given because, being perennials, they do not belong there. But most persons consider them as annuals and treat them accordingly, and by so doing they fail to secure from them the pleasure which these most beautiful flowers can give when properly grown. If we sow seed of them in spring, our plants will just begin to show bloom by the time the hot, dry weather of midsummer is upon us, and that will put an end to the display. We will have to wait until cooler weather comes for flowers. The only way to obtain early flowers from the Pansy is by depending on old plants brought over the winter in the garden, or young plants procured from the florist, who grows them during the winter for spring use. This last is the most satisfactory method, as young plants are strong and vigorous, and ready to begin flowering when procured. Of course, we all want Pansies, and a good many of them.

◆

The Sweet Pea is a peculiar plant in some respects, and requires treatment quite unlike that given other plants if we would have it do its best. It must be planted very early—as soon, in fact, as the ground can be dug up to receive the seed. This because it is a plant that does better in cool weather than in heat, and the conditions which prevail in spring are precisely those best suited to it in getting a start. If it form strong roots before the hot weather is upon us, and these roots are deep in the soil, where they will remain moist and cool, we may expect fine flowers, and a great many of them, but if we give it a shallow planting, which brings its roots near the surface, and a late one, which obliges it to get its start in weather not to its liking, we need not wonder if it disappoint us. The plan I follow with it is this: In April I dig V-shaped trenches about six inches deep. I sow the seed in the bottom of these about an inch apart. I cover it with about an inch of soil, which I press down firmly. When the plants have grown to a height of three inches I fill in about them with some of the soil thrown out from the trench. I continue to do this at intervals as the vines reach up until the trench is filled. In this way I succeed in getting the roots of the plants deep in cool, moist soil. The best trellis for them is one made by fastening coarse-meshed wire netting to posts. It should be at least six feet wide, as the Sweet Pea makes a rampant growth under favorable circumstances. In order to assure a bountiful crop of flowers

throughout the season it is absolutely necessary to prevent the formation of seed. Go over the vines daily and remove every flower past its prime. If this advice is followed, we can have fine flowers, and plenty of them, from June to November.

If the season should happen to be a dry one, grass-clippings from the lawn can be used to advantage about many plants as a mulch. Tea Roses will be benefited greatly by covering the soil about them with three or four inches of it, as it will prevent too-rapid evaporation of moisture from the soil and assist materially in keeping the heat of the intensely hot sunshine of midsummer noonday from injuring the roots near the surface.

What has been said about the prevention of the development of seed on the Sweet Pea applies with equal pertinence to most annuals. Let seed form, and you will get but few flowers from them after that. All the energies of the plant will be devoted to the effort of perpetuating itself. But interfere with the production and development of seed, and the plant will at once make another attempt to do what Nature urges it to, and the first step in this process is the production of flowers. By thus continuously interfering with the natural operations of the plant we keep it flowering throughout the season in its vain attempt to overcome our opposition.



THE TERMINUS

BY WILLIAM HURD HILLIER

THE wide town swings to view; the train speeds past
Long, roaring freights. Mysterious voices blend
With the shrill steam: now, underneath the vast
Vault of the Terminus, we find at last
Our journey's end.

Beyond the doors, a wintry wilderness,
The formidable streets lie strange and far.
But see, familiar faces wait to bless
Our coming. How informed with joyfulness
Their greetings are!

I wonder, if when into the world's great,
Sad terminus, I come unasked, unknown,
Will welcoming dear faces for me wait?
Or must I through the hollow-clanging gate
Pass out alone?

HICKEY OF OLD THIRTEEN

By John Austin Schetty



HICKEY and the Captain were two angry and disgusted men as they watched the Chief depart. It was just fifteen minutes after nine in the morning, and Hickey, for the first time in his record, had been late. Worse, he had been smartly rebuked by the Chief, who had been accompanied by a little man of brisk, alert ways and keen eye. The Chief's unwonted tone had so angered Hickey that he did not observe the little man making notes on a small pad which he carried; for the same reason he had not told his superior how his defection had been caused by the illness of his little daughter, who was even now, perhaps, dying at home. If he had, things might not have been so bad. He did not explain even to Captain Williams, for his heart was too full. And Williams forbore asking, for he still believed Hickey to be the best man in the department.

"The Chief wouldn't have kicked," said the Captain after a moment, "only he had the new Commissioner along."

"The who?" asked Hickey blankly.

"The new Fire Commissioner! Lord! I thought you knew all the time! That's what got me, how you had the nerve to talk back, and him there."

"Never laid eyes on him before," said Hickey. "If that's him, I'll get trimmed for a week! Well, it can't be——"

The sentence was cut short by the sudden clang of the gong. With a bound, both men sprang into the supply. After them came coats, helmets, boots, and men, all tumbled together in a heap on top of the hose. The horses, Dick and X-Ray, clattered to their places almost as quick as thought. The harness snapped together. Hickey picked up the reins and the doors swung wide. The Captain, with a quick look behind, saw old Thirteen sending forth clouds of smoke and was satisfied.

"Let her go!" he yelled in Hickey's ear. With a bound they swung out, over the curb, and into the street. Some passers-by looked their admiration. The whole thing had taken the half of a minute.

When they swung into the avenue the thoroughfare was crowded with vehicles of all kinds. But Hickey touched the gong, and they scattered or seemed to melt away. Some belated ones huddled close to the curb. Dick and X-Ray were only beginning to get in their fine work. Moved by a kind of equine exaltation, the two brutes thundered over the roadway with every muscle a-quiver. At such moments Hickey was a king, and people did him homage.

"Look at that cloud," said Williams, pointing to a pillar of smoke arising from the heart of the city. "Looks as if it were the Chapman store."

"Right, Cap! Just what I was thinkin'." They turned a corner on two wheels and headed down a side-street.

"Where are you going, Hick?" demanded Williams.

"Down through Dey Street—it will cut out one minute, Cap, and——"

"But it's like going down to hell to take that grade."

"I'll hold 'em back. I've done it before."

Dey Street was a thoroughfare that took a sheer drop of fifty feet to the level of the town. It was a short cut but a dangerous one, for it turned an angle, then dropped again. Williams turned and looked back. Old Thirteen was coming right behind them.

"God! She'll go to pieces if ever she comes down here," he muttered hoarsely. With one hand grasping the seat in front of him, he waved the other wildly, and was immensely relieved to see Baxter turn off into Washington. The supply had taken the street twice before and always with their hearts in their mouths. Williams had vowed long ago that they never should take it again and—but here they were already going down; it was too late to stop! Bang! They went over a cross-walk with a bound that sent every man in the air. Dick and X-Ray were just beginning to appreciate the grade. The wagon crowded upon their rear, but Hickey pressed the brake and she drew off again. Right ahead was the turn before mentioned. Each man gripped his partner and Williams flung his arm about Hickey's waist. He almost wished he had forbidden him to take that grade.

"Look out for the curb, man, you'll kill us all!" he cried hoarsely in the driver's ear. Hickey yanked at Dick and jammed desperately at the brake, but the speed increased. What was the matter? God! He knew!—the brake was broken! The Captain saw his face whiten; the next instant the corner seemed to whirl about them like a merry-go-round gone mad, they grazed the curb by a hair, while the wagon hung poised for one fateful instant at an angle that threatened destruction to them all, then she came down with a jolt which sent every man a foot in the air!

"Brake, you idiot! Brake!" cried Williams.

"I can't! she's broke!" replied Hickey.

Like a flash he felt he was responsible for these men's deaths. Before them lay the rest of the grade right down into the heart of the town. If no one would get in their way, they might yet be saved. The horses now began to go a little wildly. The wagon with that grade under it came up against them with a jolt. They were not used to that; it startled them, and they plunged quickly forward, as Hickey knew they would.

"Whoa, Dick, old boy! Come, come there, that's it! Easy, Exie, easy!" But Dick and X-Ray were thoroughly startled now. They snorted and reared, then dashed madly ahead. Suddenly a light delivery wagon shot from a side-street. Its driver never saw the oncoming team, which tore by the tailboard, leaving him safe by a miracle. Hickey saw people in the street warning others away with wild gestures. Mechanically he clanged his gong, but he had all he could do to hold the horses now; they were running away!

If he could only clear the nearest corner ahead of Six. She always came down that way on this box, and it was usually a race to see whether she or Thirteen reached the district first. He was on level ground at last and breathing freely, when suddenly he saw the crowd clearing from the cross-street. He knew what that meant,—Six was coming!

His only hope was to get there ahead of her. Over the stones they went, and there was Six's team plunging as madly as his own. Only the fraction of a second could save them. With a wild hope the name of his little girl sprang to his lips. "Lucy," he murmured, as though it were a prayer. Six's driver was tugging madly at the reins, but it was as futile to try and hold that heavy machine back as it would be to stop an avalanche. Yet he tried desperately, and the next instant Hickey tore past him, so near that he thought the pole of Six would surely catch in his spokes. But they were saved.

It had been one of those moments the portent of which is only realized at a later time. They were the second machine on the scene. There was Two, barely getting her hose on a hydrant, and Two's was the nearest house in the vicinity. The Chief's wagon came rattling towards them. The Commissioner was with him, and the Chief yelled to Hickey as he passed, but it missed him. From all the streets in the vicinity came trucks and engines now. At last Hickey had the horses under control again. Dick and X-Ray were coming to their senses. Their mouths were covered with foam and their sides went in and out like bellows; it had been the run of their lives! Quickly they wheeled about, and in another moment were pawing in front of the burning building. Old Thirteen had just rounded the corner.

"Quick, there, you blamed fool!" cried the Chief, coming upon them now. "What in thunder did you run to the end of the block for? Get at that hydrant and run up your hose!" Hickey did not reply. In a trice the men were out. A pall of smoke hung above their heads. The Chapman store was one of the largest in town, and it always meant serious work when a fire started there. It was an eight-story brick-and-iron structure, supposedly fireproof, where there were at least eight varieties of manufacture. Though but a few minutes since the fire had been discovered, the blaze was already pouring through the elevator

shaft as from a funnel. More engines came clattering about in answer to a second alarm, and on their heels a half dozen ambulances.

"Get your inhalers on, boys," commanded Williams to his crew, "and take your line down through the cellar."

The doors crashed beneath the axes and a volume of suffocating vapor poured out. Chemical fumes, laden with death, choked them, blinded them. Twice they stepped in, twice they stepped out!

"God! We've got to do it, men! Here, give it to me!" cried Williams, seizing the nozzle, adjusting the inhaler and protector, then stepping down. The others, their lungs filled with ozone and renewed in vigor, stepped after him. Inside all was a swirling mass of choke-laden vapor. At the farther end a fitful gleam of flame showed now and then. The nozzle shook with sudden power and a stream of water shot across the darkened space. After a few minutes a man tottered, then staggered out. He was quickly relieved by another. Then Williams had to go. Hickey stood by, always the last to leave, the first to return. His vigor was remarkable. Still, the smoke and the flame showed no sign of diminishing. It was going to be a hard fight.

Meanwhile the Chief was directing operations on the floor above. The Commissioner had insisted on participating to the fullest extent, and now he stood with the Chief and some men directly above the fire, which, despite the flood of water below, had burned the floor about them. The latter was old and worn, and one end suddenly parted from the farther wall.

"You fellows had better get out of here now," said the Chief, as he ordered them back to a safe distance. "I'll be with you in a minute. We'll have this in hand soon." He had expected to see the Commissioner move away with the rest, but that personage stayed.

"Confound him!" muttered the Chief under his breath. "That floor will drop him to perdition in a minute if he don't look out." The thought was hardly formed before there came a burst of smoke as black as night, then a sheet of flame seemed to encircle the room. There came a crack and a hiss! And the floor dropped away with a crash! The Chief made a flying leap and thought the Commissioner jumped too; but when he and his men could see through the murk the Commissioner was gone! With hoarse shouts they rushed to the edge of the abyss and looked down. It was like gazing into Vesuvius,—gleaming flame, the sheet of water, and pendent smoke. They called, but got no answer.

"If the Commissioner is not dead down there, he'll live just about two minutes," cried the Chief hoarsely. "It's a case of hustle!"

Meanwhile Hickey worked desperately. There seemed to be a fever in his veins ever urging him on to greater danger. He waded through

water above his waist and plunged into that volcano of smoke and smouldering fires as though it were his element. God! How stubborn it was, and how it stifled the very breath! Even with the inhaler on he was forced to totter out like a feeble old man for a breath of fresh air. Williams and the men were close behind. Daly and another had collapsed utterly and been sent away.

"Take care, Hick," cried the Captain thickly, as he started for the cellar again; "better go slow, or you'll overdo it!" Before he had finished the man was back in the thick of it again. He worked his way towards the rear, where the fire, gleaming brightly, showed in lurid flashes. It had caught up with a heap of packing-cases which looked as if they might contain chemicals. He wanted to relieve Kennedy, who with another man was handling the hose. He saw them both in faint outline, then suddenly perceived that the floor above had burned through at one end. The other two saw it also and moved back cautiously. The next moment it came down with a crash and a smother of flame. Drawn into the vortex of the larger area, the smoke and murk drifted partially away. It was then Hickey discovered that someone had come down with the floor. He saw the figure of a man struggling and turned to signal Kennedy, but the two men were not to be seen. The figure ceased to struggle. No wonder! There were fumes enough there to kill a dozen men. There was no time to lose. He pushed forward, wading, climbing, tearing. Once his foot slipped and he nearly fell on his back into that swirling black lake about him. As he drew near, he was beaten, stifled, and blinded by the water which came pouring from old Thirteen's nozzle like a Niagara. He gasped, choked, and then he clutched the unconscious man. The next moment he had him in his arms. Then, with temples that throbbed like the fire-hose, with eyes that burned and saw blood red, with lungs that seemed as if they were filled with the fumes of Hell, he staggered, gasping, cut, and singed, with his burden to the foot of the stairs that led to the street. There a group of men, shouting hoarsely, came upon him.

"The Commissioner is caught back there!" they cried.

Then they paused, for the Commissioner lay in Hickey's arms!

A few moments later, when the Commissioner had quite recovered, his rescuer stood before him and handed him a small memorandum pad.

"It fell from your pocket, sir, as I carried you up the steps," he said. The official took it. "Ah, yes," he said with a peculiar smile, "I remember. You belong to old Thirteen, and you were fifteen minutes late this morning. You were ordered to report to the Board. Well, Hickey, you can tell the Chief from me that you won't have to report just now. When you do, it will be for something better than a reprimand." He smiled pleasantly and held forth his hand. Hickey took it and shook it heartily.

"Thank you, sir," he said simply.

A FIANCÉ IN TRIPLICATE

By Elliott Flower



THE amateur hypnotist took the usual measures to release his friend from hypnotic control.

"I hope you will pardon me, old man," he said, "but I was called away unexpectedly during the experiments, and you've been here alone during the entire afternoon. However, I had sufficient forethought to give you a mental suggestion to remain here. If you had wandered out, it might have been disastrous."

"Why?" asked the subject.

"Well, you were under a sort of a love-spell," explained the amateur hypnotist. "It seemed to me a good chance to get a few pointers on love-making, and for a time I let you be most devoted to the piano-stool. You did it all right too, old man. If you ever propose to a girl with the sentiment and passion that you wasted on that piano-stool, you'll win her, and no mistake. As a lover you are simply superb. I only hope," becoming suddenly thoughtful, "that Clara didn't drop in here while I was gone."

Warren Bennings looked startled. So far as making love to Clara Willis was concerned, he was quite willing to do it. In truth, he had done it after the conventional methods of society, but he had not reached the proposal point, and he had a natural desire to know what he was doing when he did reach it.

The Willis library, he knew, was almost a clubroom for some of Clara's friends. The records of a little society to which they all belonged were kept there, and the meetings also were held there. The president and the secretary were occasionally there in Clara's absence.

"Now, if Clara came in," he went on, communing with himself, "and I made successful love to her, I would be quite content—provided I knew it. A fellow doesn't like to have any uncertainty about such matters. But if some other girl happened to drop in—well, it would be awkward."

He shook his head doubtfully.

A letter was brought to him while he was at breakfast the following morning—a dainty little missive that set his heart to beating tumultuously even before he opened it.

"I wonder," was all he could say.

Then, after a moment of hesitation, he opened and read it.

The waiter found him sitting limply in his chair, muttering.

"Your breakfast, sir," said the waiter.

"Take it away," said Bennings.

"You ordered it, sir," urged the waiter in astonishment.

Bennings straightened up in his chair.

"If I choose to lose my appetite," he said sharply, "is it any of your business?"

The waiter retired with the dishes, and Bennings walked out on the street, still muttering. "It is so sweet to know that I am yours," he said, quoting from the letter, as he wandered aimlessly in the direction of his office.

A telephone message brought Harold Willis to him.

"Willis," he said, "I am engaged to Belle Rayber. She says so herself, at least by inference, and I know she wouldn't lie about a little thing like that."

"Warren, my boy, I congratulate you," returned Willis heartily.

"Stop!" cautioned Bennings menacingly. "I can stand a good deal, but if you do that again, somebody will have to use the ambulance call. Just drop everything of that sort and get down to business. You got me into this scrape, and you must get me out of it. Your infernal hypnotism did it."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" mused Willis. "She met you in the library, did she? Well, you ought to have no trouble in settling that matter satisfactorily."

"How?"

"Marry her, of course."

"But I don't want to."

"No matter; it's your duty. As a gentleman, you can't do anything else."

"True, true," admitted Bennings. "The chivalrous thing to do is quite clear, but it isn't necessary to do it right away. My head is sort of muddled just now, anyway."

Bennings decided to go to the golf-links that afternoon. He thought he would be safe there, but almost the first person he saw was Ella Renfield, and there was something in her smile that frightened him. It was an inviting smile, a knowing smile, the smile that indicates a perfect understanding. He was not at all sure that, in his effort to avoid Belle Rayber, he had not run into greater danger, for Miss Renfield also was one of Clara's intimate friends.

They started out together, and he watched her as a man might be expected to watch a dynamite cartridge that he feared would explode.

"You're very abstracted, it seems to me," she said at last resentfully.

"Am I?" he asked.

"Yes, you are," she asserted. "You don't regret it, do you?"

"Oh, no, certainly not," he said hastily. No gentleman, he told himself, could regret anything under the circumstances.

"But you're not at all as you were yesterday afternoon," she went on.

"What did I do then?" he inquired thoughtlessly.

"Don't you know?" she demanded.

"Yes, yes, of course I know," he answered hastily; "but—but it would be so nice to have you tell me."

"Do you really want me to, Warren?" she asked, with soft stress on the Warren.

"Please do," he urged, for he was desperate now and determined to play the game out. At least he would find out what sort of a predicament he was in.

"Well, I won't," she said abruptly, and then smiled tantalizingly. "The idea of asking a girl to do that! As if you didn't know what you said and did."

"To think," he muttered to himself, as he looked at the pretty girl a few feet from him, "that that whole afternoon should have been wasted, so far as memory is concerned."

His reason told him that a clubhouse tête-à-tête with Miss Renfield might result in further complications, and in trying to avoid one he found himself unexpectedly alone with another of Clara's friends, Josephine Barnes. Instantly he had a cold chill. Was he also her fiancé? Would she too reproach him for his coldness? He tried to avoid any chance of this by talking continuously, and he was conscious of saying the most inane things and of laughing at nothing at all.

"You're bearing your disappointment remarkably well," she put in finally in spite of him.

"Am I?" he asked, bewildered. This was a new departure, and it both startled and puzzled him.

"It is so hard for a man to be sensible about such things, as you are," she explained. "They take a refusal——"

"Yes, yes, of course," he broke in. "You refused me?"

"Certainly," she said, surprised.

"You're a brick!" he exclaimed with grateful enthusiasm. "I'm your debtor for life! If there is anything——"

"Weren't you in earnest?" she demanded.

He saw more trouble ahead. As a gentleman, to avoid humiliating her, he had to protest warmly that he never was more in earnest.

"But reason tells me," he explained, "that it is foolish to be hasty in affairs of such importance. I was dreadfully disappointed—you cannot imagine my agony—but I admire you the more for—for—your conservatism."

He was floundering, and his mind was possessed with a great fear, but what other course could he pursue?

"Do—do you want me to reconsider?" she asked with modest hesitation.

"Y-yes," he answered weakly.

"You don't seem very enthusiastic about it," she commented; "not at all as you were yesterday afternoon."

"I'm not feeling very well to-day," he pleaded, and here he spoke the exact truth. "But," he added, determined to be a gentleman to the last, "I do want you to reconsider—really I do. Won't you, please?"

"Not now," she said after a pause. "I must think."

"Yes," he put in hastily, "do think. One should think a long time, you know."

"Later, I may——"

"Wait and think," he urged.

As soon as he got back to the city he hunted up Willis. He found him at home in the library.

"Harold," he said disconsolately, "I am engaged to Ella Renfield."

"Library, yesterday afternoon?" inquired Willis.

"Of course," said Bennings.

"Great Scott! what a glorious time you must have had!" commented Willis.

"I suppose so," groaned Bennings, "but it's like a champagne dinner—I only know it by my condition to-day." Then his resentment put a little more life into him, and he said, with some display of temper: "But it's all your fault, and you've got to get me out of this scrape."

"Do the gentlemanly thing, my boy," advised Willis.

"And marry two of them!" exclaimed Bennings.

"It is an awkward situation," admitted Willis, "but you can readily see that it would be the act of a contemptible boor to jilt a girl you have asked to marry you."

Bennings was too troubled to discern the spirit of raillery in this, and before he could reply the door opened and Clara Willis entered. As Bennings rose to greet her she went straight to his side and looked confidently into his eyes.

"I suppose you've told Brother Harold," she said.

"What's this?" cried Willis, jumping from his chair. "Have you been trifling with my sister too?"

Bennings had been on the point of collapse, but at this onslaught, where he had expected support, his indignation mastered him.

"Confound you!" he cried, "it's all your fault. You made me

propose to every girl in the neighborhood. You had control of me, and I was speaking for you and not for myself. I was your proxy. They are yours, and I turn them all over to you—all except Clara."

His tone became suddenly gentle as he mentioned her name, and it was her turn to look troubled.

"Harold," she said to her brother, "you'd better be careful."

He subsided at once, much to the surprise of Bennings.

"I suppose I *am* to blame," he said, "and I'll see what I can do to rectify matters this evening. I wish you'd be here, Warren."

"I'll be anywhere and do anything to get out of this trouble," answered Bennings bitterly. Then, as he was leaving, he found a chance to whisper to Clara: "So far as you are concerned, I meant every word of it." To his surprise, she had seemed to be sympathetic rather than angry, and this gave him courage to make the avowal.

As he passed into the hall she followed and beckoned him into the reception-room. Then, after an anxious glance to see that her brother was not coming, she stood on tiptoes and whispered something in his ear.

"No?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes," she asserted. "Of course, if we hadn't all known you so well, we wouldn't have dared; but Harold—— Well, you know what kind of a practical joker Harold is!"

"I ought to have guessed it," said Bennings. "I was downright stupid!"

"But you can get your revenge," she suggested.

"How?"

She stood on tiptoes and whispered again, whereupon he laughed.

"S-s-sh!" she cautioned.

"I'll do it," he said, "but please understand one thing."

"What?" she asked.

"I meant what I didn't tell you yesterday. Did you mean what I thought you answered?"

"Yes," she whispered, with a blush. "Now go."

Bennings tried to look worried when he was ushered into the library that evening, but it was hard work. When one is about to turn a joke on the joker, it is difficult to look worried. Besides, Clara gave him a smile that he alone understood. The girls were also having troubles of their own in trying to look serious.

"Mr. Bennings has an explanation to make," announced Willis. He had carefully considered the matter, and had decided that this would make a situation more farcical than any that had preceded it. And it did, but not in the way Willis had expected. Instead of showing the anticipated discomfiture at being thus abandoned to his fate, Bennings was perfectly self-possessed.

"I grieve to state," he said, bowing to each of the girls in turn, "that in a moment of mental aberration yesterday afternoon I became a fiancé in triplicate. Happy indeed would I be with any one of the three, but it has been impossible for either my heart or my mind to choose, so I have had to match pennies with myself to reach a decision, and the Goddess of Chance decreed that Miss Rayber is to be my wife. Belle!" he cried, suddenly turning towards her with outstretched arms.

"Here! Stop that!" exclaimed Willis, hastily getting between them. "This joke has gone far enough."

"There's no joke about it," retorted Bennings. "She's mine, I tell you, and I'm going to show the kind of a lover I am when I'm not hypnotized. Stand aside!"

"Don't you touch me," protested Miss Rayber, almost in tears.

"She's not yours!" thundered Willis excitedly.

"I have her letter," persisted Bennings. "'It is so sweet to know that I——'"

The rest of the quotation from the letter was lost in the protestations of Miss Rayber.

"Oh, why did you get me to write it?" she finally asked of Willis.

"It was a joke," answered that perturbed individual. "Can't you see?"—turning to Bennings—"that it was a joke?"

"On whom?" demanded Bennings.

"On you, of course," said Willis.

"Oh, no, it wasn't," retorted Bennings. "I get a bride out of it. Come to me, Belle."

The girls, with the exception of Miss Rayber, were beginning to see the joke now.

"Of course she's yours," they said.

"I tell you she's not!" cried Willis angrily.

"If the joke's on me, she certainly is," insisted Bennings.

"Well, it isn't on you," conceded Willis, "and Miss Rayber isn't your fiancée; she's mine."

Clara Willis smiled and nodded at Bennings, as if to say, "Didn't I tell you so?"

"I devised the whole scheme and even dictated the letter," Willis went on desperately. "You didn't propose to anybody."

"Oh, yes, I did," replied Bennings.

Somehow everyone seemed to look at Clara, and Clara was blushing.

"With two more men for the tableau," laughed Miss Renfield, "this would make a splendid comedy."

"It would, indeed," admitted Miss Barnes, with a sigh.

THE LOVE OF MONSIEUR

BY

GEORGE GIBBS

AUTHOR OF "IN SEARCH OF MADEMOISELLE," ETC.



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THE LOVE OF
MONSTER

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